

FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

**REPORTS OF
STANDING
COMMITTEES
OF SYNOD**

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REPORT OF THE RELIGION AND MORALS COMMITTEE

Convener: Rev I D MacDonald

INTRODUCTION

THE Word of God is marvellously adapted by its divine Author to direct nations, as well as individuals, to the path of peace and true blessedness in their respective spheres. When nations, through their political leaders and the mass of the people, reject the direction of the Most High, then confusion and misery are inevitable. Moreover, the solemn and inviolable warning upon nations, with respect to their attitude to Christ in His cause and kingdom on earth, is that “the nation and kingdom that will not serve Thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted” (Isa 60:12). It must then be a matter of keen sorrow to those who love their nation to see it, increasingly and determinedly, disregarding and opposing God as Creator, Christ as King of Sion and King of nations, and His Word as the supreme guide. In the past year, the United Kingdom voted in a new Labour Government, and it is the professed position of the new Prime Minister that he is an atheist. There is scarcely any substantial difference on moral principles among the competing political parties in our land. The present government, however, does appear to be pursuing an even more liberal and ungodly agenda than that of the previous government. Before the dust had settled on the new Prime Minister’s ascending to the position of power, a bill was placed before parliament aimed at legalising assisted suicide. In addition, efforts have been renewed to bring out a “conversion therapy ban”, ostensibly in relation to quasi-psychological efforts at freeing sodomites from their lustful perversion, but with the clear aim also of criminalising the efforts of churches and parents who would seek to prevent such sinful behaviour in those under their care. The Scottish Government had previously dropped its own threatened law in this area which would have been among the most liberal and draconian of similar laws internationally. Instead, they are seeking to come under the legislation of Westminster, and it remains to be seen whether this is any less oppressive. When the literally daily incidents of murder and violent crime, the increasing drug abuse death rate, and the national obsession with drinking, pleasure seeking, and professional sports such as football, continue apace and multiply, there is an inevitable conclusion that our nation is being given over judicially to a heaven-provoking course of self-destruction which can only lead to devastating judgments unless national repentance intervenes.

It is sobering to reflect that no small part of the cause of the national collapse of morality is due to the deliberate and self-destructive policies and practices of the professing churches of Christ in the land. It seems as if the national churches vie with one another, and even with the world itself, to be foremost in promoting the popular godless agenda, and not least in the realm of normalising and advancing sodomy and gender perversion. It is no surprise to find these churches in decline and turmoil. The Church of Scotland is reported to be on

track for extinction within three decades if current trends in membership decline continue. The Church of England has been reeling from child abuse scandals which forced its liberal and godless Archbishop, Justin Welby, to resign in shame. King Charles has also been seen to undermine the nation's Christian heritage. On a Sabbath, he opened the State Apartments at Windsor Castle for the celebration of the Muslim Iftar with 360 Muslims at the close of Ramadan, including an Islamic call to prayer. Also, the Prime Minister, two days later, warmly welcomed a group of Muslim worshippers in the ancient Westminster Hall. In addition, in April 2025, he further undermined our Protestant constitution by visiting the pope in connection with the celebration of the Roman Catholic Jubilee Year.

We look in vain for signs of any revival of true religion in our land, and thus we must join with the lament of the Church in Jeremiah's day, "We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble!" (Jer 8:15). Yet it has been rightly observed that there is no less display of the glory of God's grace and power in preserving in faithfulness a small remnant of the true followers of Christ in a day of widespread backsliding and irreligion, than is seen in a day of widespread gospel prosperity and revival. We have to acknowledge that throughout the borders of the United Kingdom the Lord has preserved to Himself "seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (1 Ki 19:18). While it must be our duty to long and pray for better days to come, as we ask, "By whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small" (Am 7:2), we also hear the Lord saying, "Who hath despised the day of small things?" (Zec 4:10).

RELIGION

THE LATE POPE'S POLITICAL AGENDA

Prior to Bergoglio being elected pope in 2013, the Papal Chair was occupied by Ratzinger, a conservative, who in his younger days served in the Hitler Youth. In the context of the papal system, a conservative is one who hankers after, and seeks to re-establish, traditional Romish beliefs such as the Latin Mass. Liberals on the other hand seek to modernise and establish relevance to the world by embracing it and compromising with it. Ratzinger showed little inclination or capacity for sorting out the myriad sexual abuse and other scandals that beset the papal system during his time in office. Officially he resigned, but there are credible suggestions that he was forced out to make way for a more effective political operator, for the papal system is essentially one where religion is utterly subverted by political power and ambition.

Bergoglio, an Argentinian Jesuit, was the choice of his fellow cardinals. A liberal leftist, he set out to remake both the papal system and the wider world according to his own depraved notions. He embraced the LGBT movement and incorporated its ideology within the papal system as much as he dared. He was all for immigration into western countries, positively encouraging illegal immigration, from which, in the USA, his organisation has profited financially.

He enthusiastically pushed climate-change scaremongering, the promotion of the globalist World Economic Forum and every other liberal, leftist and “woke” scheme. He somehow made the abuse scandals mysteriously disappear from the public eye, thereby showing his influence and control of the media. He appointed over 80% of the college of cardinals which would choose his successor.

As well as being the head of the papal system, the pope operates as an agent of change both internally and externally. His operations within his own domain are largely reported, but his operations externally are largely unseen, at least until their effects are secured. Since the Reformation, the Jesuit Order has been that part of the papal system tasked with engaging in the hidden work of external change in society to favour the Vatican. It is so politically dangerous to society, that in the 18th century it was banned in virtually every western country. Driven underground, it was revived by Pope Pius VII in the 19th century when it became more circumspect, although not, we have reason to fear, less dangerous. The true nature of the pope and his system is, we believe, stated by the Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians Chapter 2: “And then shall that Wicked be revealed . . . even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish”. For this reason, we can say of that system what we should say of virtually none other: that nothing that she says, or is reported of her, should be taken at face value, but rather we should expect deceit from all her agents, particularly from the Jesuits due to their track record.

Sometimes the machinations of the papal system are driven by conflict into the open. Such has been the case with the end of the Biden administration in the USA and the election of President Trump. President Biden, it appears, very much shared the late pope’s outlook and ambitions. One of Biden’s last actions was to award him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, eulogising him as “a light of faith, hope, and love that shines brightly across the world”. The election of Trump and other leaders such as Bukele in El Salvador and Milei in Argentina, raised serious obstacles to papal political ambitions in the Americas. Trump, in ordering the end of illegal immigration and the deportation of illegals, has brought to an end a very lucrative scheme for the papal system whereby, during the Biden years, it obtained over two billion US dollars from the Federal Government to provide services for illegals. At this turn of events, the late pope wrote a wicked letter to his US bishops on 10th February 2025, urging them to resist Trump’s deportations, saying: “The rightly formed conscience cannot fail to make a critical judgment and express its disagreement with any measure that tacitly or explicitly identifies the illegal status of some migrants with criminality”. There followed a move nine days later by the bishops to sue the US Government for the loss of revenues; a legal effort that is thought likely to end in the Supreme Court. A similar USAID case came before that Court on 5th March 2025 which found against the US Government. In 1981, the Court consisted of three Episcopalians, two Presbyterians, one Lutheran, one Methodist, one other Protestant and one Roman Catholic. In 2025, it consists of

seven Roman Catholics (one attends an Episcopalian church), one nominal Protestant and one Jew. It is obvious that the devious and ambitious nature of the papacy has not changed. Her remaining power is a reminder of our need to pray for her promised downfall and destruction.

THE STATE OF THE SCOTTISH CHURCHES – IGNORANCE OF TRUE RELIGION AND THE DOWNGRADE OF THE GOSPEL

Scotland is plagued with the spread of both irreligion and false religion. In addition, a dangerous disease lurks in a corrupted and worldly Christianity, which is increasingly found in the churches of the land. One measure of the growing irreligion may be taken from the current rate of decline in membership of the Church of Scotland which is on track to reach extinction by the year 2042. The membership level stood at around 1.3 million in the 1950s, but has now dropped to around 270,000. The average age of those attending services is 62, showing that the younger generation has largely forsaken the national church. The rate of decline in attendance across all the Scottish Presbyterian churches is significant, and were figures available, it is likely that the trends would lead to similar projections.

In the Christian churches which remain, there is a downgrade in terms of the purity and spirituality of gospel doctrine, worship and holiness. One factor which tends to accelerate this trend is the erroneous view that ecumenicism is essential for the church's survival. The outcome tends to be a move to the lowest common denominator. In what appeared to be a veiled dig at the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) stated in a report on ecumenicism, approved at their 2024 general assembly, that "any Church in the present day which has no ecumenical relations with other Churches is schismatic". This bold statement fails to take account of the fact that it is entirely justifiable to forbear entering upon ecumenical relations with other churches if these do not uphold the teaching of Scripture as embodied in the *Confession of Faith* in principle and in practice. The position of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland is that she is open to union with any church which upholds the teaching of the *Confession of Faith* in practice as well as in profession. The views of the renowned Free Church Professor Dr George Smeaton on such strident calls for external church union sum up the true Scriptural position:

The necessity of such a thing can in no way be deduced, as we shall afterwards prove, from the doctrine of Jesus and His Apostles. The Church has her own peculiar unity in her Lord before these humanly concocted schemes of external unification begin. And all these schemes have their dangers as well as their advantages. They are right when they bring to light or give expression to the spiritual, invisible, and everlasting unity which knits all the members in every place to their head, and to each other in Him. They are fraught with danger, are more cognate to Popish than Protestant sentiments when advocated as an

indispensable duty at any cost, or merely with a view to give a particular Church a more worthy or respectable position in the eye of others. . . . The notion which I see expressed in certain quarters of the Church, that you cannot recede from these Union efforts without sin, is one I do not share.

In the same report it is rather revealing to learn more about just how far the ecumenicism of the Free Church (Continuing) goes. There are ecumenical relations with churches and church associations such as the Associated Presbyterian Churches, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the European Conference of Reformed Churches, the Church of England (Continuing) and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England & Wales. It is interesting to note that they place some limits to their own rule, for when approached by the Free Church of Scotland “to consider how best to promote the Christian good of Scotland”, it was felt necessary to “tell them from the start that they could not meet with them without raising and discussing the wrongs of the past”.

One main area where the decline of the Presbyterian churches in Scotland may be seen is in the rapidly growing adoption into public worship of the Pagan and Romanist festival of Christmas. In recent years, some churches, such as the Free Church, have adopted Christmas in a full-scale way, openly celebrating it in their worship and with Christmas trees and images of the child in the manger in their churches. Other churches may not have gone so far in this direction, but some are lukewarm in their principles here. At least one Free Church (Continuing) minister has led a Christmas service for a local school, in association with the Church of Scotland. When professedly Reformed churches give an uncertain sound on these relics of Romanism which were swept out of Scotland by our godly and zealous Reformers at the time of the first Reformation, we have some measure of the declension in zeal for the truth and love to Christ as the King of Zion which is taking place in our land.

There are numerous churches which still claim to adhere to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, but in some instances at least, it is evident that there is no true, spiritual commitment to many of the truths of Scripture contained in it. Instead of an emphasis on the doctrines of free grace such as eternal election, a limited atonement, effectual calling, and a free, unfettered offer of the gospel to sinners as sinners, there is in reality often a practical Arminianism, or at least an easy-believism, with a faith amounting to no more than an intellectual assent to the historical truths of the gospel. Another great lack is a sense of sin, which in turn is due to an absence of the fear of God with a lack of emphasis upon His infinite majesty, authority, holiness and justice. The God whom they present is in reality a caricature of the living and true God – a God who is all mercy, and who loves all men in the same way. One effect of such low views of sin and the God against whom it is committed is the undervaluing of the necessity of an atonement which rendered a full satisfaction to divine Justice for the sins which will be pardoned. In turn this leads to diminished views of the preciousness and

of the extent of Christ's offices as a Mediator, with relatively little emphasis upon His priestly office. In many instances the Saviour they present to their people is in reality no more than a mere man whose great example and kindness is worthy of our imitation. Where such errors prevail, it is ordinary that mixed congregations are addressed in such a way as gives the impression that all are the Lord's people, so that in reality there is very little preaching of the law addressed to the conscience to convince of sin and misery, and very little call to sinners to believe the gospel and to repent.

Such preaching is, in effect, the old message of the false prophets who proclaimed "peace, peace; when there is no peace". It is common for this doctrinal downgrade to go hand in hand with a breakdown in the practice of godliness and the holy discipline of the Church. Church members are permitted to break the Sabbath openly, to indulge in the vanities of the world such as the films and professional sports which the devil's children relish, and to adorn themselves contrary to the Scriptural exhortation that "the woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man" (Deut 22:5).

It is no wonder if the worship of such churches is becoming blasphemously irreverent. The fear of God having departed, it is no wonder if reverence for His will as to how He commands us to worship Him will be disregarded. Their worship has descended into a poor imitation of the vain music concerts and secular lectures of the world. This irreverence manifests itself outwardly in the casual, worldly dress of the worshippers and often of the ministers also, and in the lack of solemn silence and attention before and during the divine worship. Men know how to attire and conduct themselves in the presence of an earthly sovereign, but such respect they withhold from the King of kings and Lord of lords in His own worship. In addition to Christmas Carol services held in the likes of the Free Church, there are such vain abominations as "Praise and Pudding" evenings on the Sabbath in place of the ordinary service.

The desolations around us are surely a call to ourselves as a Church to be on our guard against the same evil influences making encroachments upon ourselves, for the prevailing errors of the day have a tendency to infiltrate the purest of churches. It is vital that our own people have a clear knowledge of, and spiritual attachment to, the distinctive position of our own Church in relation to these and other departures from the truth. Should our people lose sight of these, and of their Scriptural basis, then it will be a matter of time before they are lost. The need for the distinctive witness of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland was never greater than it is today. The annual lecture on Church principles would seem to be of more necessity than ever it was, as a means of maintaining our knowledge of, and zeal for, the principles of the Word of God which our forefathers felt it necessary to contend for in 1893 and thereafter.

ISLAM AND THE JEWS

The eyes of the whole world have been drawn to the Jews in the last year, following the atrocities of 7th October 2023 committed upon them by Hamas,

the Palestinian terrorist group. This hatred and violence against the Jews extended to involve other Islamic nations and terror groups, such as Iran, the Lebanese Hezbollah, and the Houthis of Yemen, all of whom attacked the nation of Israel directly and without provocation. The evil, murderous nature of Islam has been on full display once again in these attacks and in the aggressive rhetoric accompanying them.

After a short-lived initial outcry against Hamas' brutality, the attention of the largely liberal media in the West has been on the supposedly over-the-top reaction by the Israeli army which subsequently invaded the Gaza Strip. The result has been an explosion in Antisemitic protests, complaints, and even violent attacks throughout Europe and the USA. Thus, what began with an unprovoked, shocking and violent attack on Israel, has resulted in an outpouring of hatred against the Jews in the so-called Christian nations of the West. In the United Kingdom, there was a 450 per cent increase in antisemitic incidents last year, with almost 2,000 incidents in the first half of 2024 alone, the highest ever reported. This trend is mirrored on a global scale with antisemitic incidents rising across the world at a rate unseen since World War II, reflected in a 340 per cent increase in total antisemitic incidents worldwide. A survey by the Anti-Defamation League found that nearly half of all adults worldwide hold significant antisemitic views (*Times of Israel*).

This trend may partially be explained by the high proportion of Muslim populations in many of these countries, including the United Kingdom, with frequent pro-Palestinian/anti-Israeli protests. But this is not the whole truth. Young people, many of them university students, are under the influence of the politically correct, liberal, "woke" movement which despises and opposes the principles of the Word of God, and thus bears a special enmity to the Christian faith and to the Jewish people. Yet the widespread extent of the outburst of antisemitism seems to embrace other sections of society, and reveals a deep-seated prejudice and hatred against the Jews.

Two main underlying reasons for this may be suggested. The first is that the Devil knows that the Jews are yet to have an honoured place in the Church of Christ when they will be converted to the Christian faith, and engrafted into their own olive tree (Rom 11:24), bringing life from the dead to the church at large (Rom 11:15). Therefore, he stirs up hatred against them, as is found in the Iranian-led Muslim attempt in the Middle East to destroy them outright as a nation, and in the antisemitic protests and violence in the West. The second reason is found in the curse of God which lies upon the Jews for their sin in rejecting their own Messiah, the Lord of glory, so that His blood has indeed come upon them and their children (Matt 27:25). Therefore, their present troubles, as with the centuries of affliction before, involve the punishment of their sin, so that it is evident that wrath is come upon them to the uttermost: "For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and

are contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost” (1 Thess 2:14-16). Yet the judicial aspect to their plight in no way justifies those who harbour hatred to them, and perpetrate deeds of violence against them. The Scriptural attitude to their present suffering is summed up in the words of Paul, “As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes” (Rom 11:28). All true followers of Christ will yearn for their salvation, not their destruction, and will join with Paul when he said, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” (Rom 10:1).

RESTRICTIONS OF CHRISTIAN RIGHTS

In Psalm 12:8, we read, “The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest of men are exalted”. This is sadly the case in Britain today when the State is accelerating a clear policy of driving the nation further from the Word of God and permitting men to walk openly after the vilest of the lusts of their hearts.

One example of the State’s hostility towards the Word of God is the attempts made by the newly elected MPs of the Labour Government to stop the practice of beginning each sitting of the House of Commons with prayer. These desires were expressed to a newly formed committee – the Commons Modernisation Committee – to end the practice because it is viewed by many as an archaic practice. Though they failed to end the practice, it galvanised many who oppose the Truth to vent their views publicly. There is also guidance by the National Secular Society to encourage people to take action to end this practice at all levels of government. Our nation has forsaken God, and these attempts to purge the land fully from every vestige of the worship of God are a sure sign that we are ripening for judgment.

Within Scotland, we see further evidence of the suppression of Christian rights in the warning that was issued by the Scottish Government to those who *live* within 200 metres of an abortion centre. These buffer zones around the abortion centres prevent the public from displaying their disapproval of women seeking an abortion. However, the law is interpreted by some to include people living in their homes, or attending places of worship, that are within the buffer zone. This means that any act of worship which is seen or overheard to be taking place within a private house or place of worship may be open to an unlimited fine and potential prison sentencing if it is construed as influencing someone who was contemplating an abortion and who happened to be passing by. The spirit of the men who sought Daniel’s life is still at large today.

The Labour Government began to explore the definition of “Islamophobia” and initially expressed the view that it is a term that is “*rooted in racism*” and “*targets expressions of Muslimness*”. At this stage, it remains to be seen whether the new definition will be accepted. However, concerns have been raised about the impact this would have on free speech. As far as it concerns Christians, if they were to say that Islam is wrong or a lie, or to refer to Christ

as being the only way to God, then they would be guilty of being Islamophobic. It is very concerning that there are continued attempts made to silence the Word of God, and, as we see in the life of Stephen, when the truth cuts the heart, men will rise in anger.

Though we may keep an eye on the policy of the Governments, national and devolved, it is harder to get a feel for what is happening within institutions and the private sector. One example of this was the recent revelation by a whistleblower concerning NHS England's compulsory course on "Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Human Rights Skills". This course sought to force all NHS staff to embrace the freedom of all to choose their sex and the benefits that have been granted to them, as well as to show a personal and professional commitment to all to ensure that no one faces any form of discrimination. The whistleblower revealed that employees needed to pass this course to advance their careers or even to be employed by the NHS. Those who held opposing views to this ideology could be driven out from their employment. Though this wicked policy was exposed, which has resulted in NHS England revising the course, it is a great cause for concern that Christians find it more and more difficult to pursue certain types of occupation in good conscience to the tenets of the Word of God, and in faithfulness to their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

MORALS

ABORTION AND THE DECLINE IN BIRTH RATES

Although man is now, tragically, in a fallen state and "conceived in guiltiness and sin", the life of the embryo in the womb – from conception to birth – is exceedingly precious. God alone has the authority to create life and to take it away, but man in his rebellion against the Most High has arrogantly declared otherwise. Consequently, we have the staggering statistic of nearly 9 million unborn babies aborted in the 50 years from 1967 – when the notorious Abortion Act was passed – up until 2017, and increasing yearly since then. Current UK estimates are between 3,500 and 4,000 terminations in a week or around 200,000 annually, and indeed the real figure could be higher. Each one of these infants is a living soul from the hand of the Creator.

It is inevitable that this will result in a decline in the birth rate. A report, compiled in June 2024 by the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC), states that in 2022 the rate had fallen to a record low of 605,000 births in England and Wales. There are a variety of social factors involved here in the UK and in other countries, but the report highlights that "abortion and contraception are the essential tools" actually used to "pursue disastrous population reduction strategies" in many countries. As a result of these anti-God schemes, alarm bells are now beginning to ring in some places. It is becoming clear, on the practical level, that there will be too few workers supporting an ageing population due to a marked fall in family size. However, other influential academics such as the Australian Darwinian philosopher Peter

Singer, Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, want to further curb population growth by abortion, and even beyond, stating that the baby is not a person until perhaps somewhere between one and two years old. In theory, in Singer's view, the horrific practice of infanticide should be allowable up to that age.

Studies in the USA have shown that in those states where abortion is restricted, after the Roe v Wade decision was overturned, the birth rate has gone up significantly. One study carried out in the first half of 2023 showed an increase of 2.3% in those states. The results would undoubtedly be replicated in the UK if similar restrictions were put in place. In Britain, however, instead of such restrictions being introduced, the doors are being opened wider. During the Covid pandemic, the government introduced temporary approval for DIY abortions. A mother pregnant for less than 10 weeks could take abortion medication at home without any medical supervision. This approval was given a permanent stamp in 2022.

Powerful pro-abortion groups such as the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) are unrelenting in promoting this evil. BPAS's CEO Clare Murphy demands that the morning after pill needs to be available in pharmacies and on supermarket shelves. Her contention is that there is "no sense" in a woman attending a medical consultation. It is "nothing but a barrier to her getting what she needs as quickly as possible". The BPAS say that they "care" for over 100,000 women each year. Some of the accounts of this so-called care are horrendous and almost too gruesome to write about. One mother said, after taking the pill, she ended up on her bathroom floor holding a transparent amniotic sac with a recognisable baby inside. She thought she was going to die. Records show that between 2020 and 2021 more than 10,000 women in England had to receive hospital treatment after taking these pills. Our nation and individuals in it are being protected by law to allow them to murder their own unborn babies. If a "patient" chooses actually to attend an abortion clinic, buffer zones have been set up to "protect" her and so prevent her at that crucial moment from considering any other viewpoint – especially a Christian one. Indeed, several Christians who have attempted to help such women have been prosecuted for praying, even silently, within these zones.

Ostensibly, precautions are supposed to be set in place to guard against irregularities in abortion practices, but there are accounts of clinics flagrantly flouting these. One clinic is being investigated by police for allegedly falsifying records. Others are suspected of having blank forms signed off by doctors who never even see the woman seeking an abortion. The general, worldly viewpoint is that we are not to judge. It is the woman's body and her decision, so we must support her. Others involved in the process, especially the baby, and even the father, receive almost no attention. So, while the declining birth rate is a serious consequence of an increasing abortion rate, the really solemn issue is that the blood of unborn babies is crying for vengeance from the ground, just as Abel's was.

VIOLENT CRIME AND DRUG/DRINK DEATH TRENDS IN SCOTLAND

Sin brings misery and death in its trail, so therefore it is not strange that the growing wickedness of Scotland is joined with growing tragedy and death. Recent data indicates such worrying trends in violent crime and substance-related deaths in Scotland. In the year ending September 2023, non-sexual crimes of violence in Scotland increased by 3% compared to the previous year, rising from 9,316 to 9,579 recorded incidents (Scottish Government). This increase is part of a broader pattern observed over the past decade, with the number of all serious violent crimes nearly doubling, reaching over 1000 incidents per month. City centres, particularly in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness, Aberdeen and Dundee, have been significant contributors to this rise. Notably, Inverness, located in the once peaceful Highlands of Scotland, has experienced a substantial increase, elevating it to one of the highest rates of violent incidents per capita (*The Times*).

Deaths connected to drug misuse have also seen a troubling increase. In 2023, Scotland registered 1,172 drug misuse deaths, a 12 per cent rise from the previous year. While this is the second lowest increase in the past six years, it underscores a persistent and severe public health issue. Opiates and opioids were implicated in 80 per cent of these deaths. The majority (88 per cent) were classified as “accidental” poisonings as it was not the victim’s intention to kill themselves. Men were twice as likely as women to die from drug misuse, and individuals in the most deprived areas were 15.3 times more likely to die from drug misuse than those in the least deprived areas (*National Records of Scotland*).

Alcohol-specific deaths have also reached alarming levels. In 2023, there were 1,277 such deaths, the highest annual total since 2008. Males accounted for approximately two-thirds of these deaths, with the highest rates observed among men aged 45 to 74. Alcohol-related harm remains significantly higher in the most deprived areas of Scotland (*Alcohol Focus Scotland*).

In response to the escalating drug death toll, Scotland has recklessly opened its first legal drug consumption room, “The Thistle”, in Glasgow. This facility provides a safe space for individuals to consume drugs under medical supervision, with the aim of reducing overdose deaths and connecting users with healthcare services. Such a step is mere expediency and contrary to the Scriptural rule that we are not to do evil that good may come. Therefore, it cannot be expected that there will be any overall benefit from such schemes, and as critics argue, they do not address the root causes of addiction.

Following the rise in alcohol-related deaths, the Scottish Government is reviewing alcohol advertising policies to mitigate exposure. The Scottish Government also increased the tax on alcohol to make it less affordable, but as the effect of this appears to have been minimal, a further increase is being proposed. Public Health Scotland has been tasked with exploring options to reduce exposure to drink and drugs, with future consultations planned to ensure proportionate actions (*The Times*).

These statistics highlight the pressing need for comprehensive Government strategies to address violent crime and substance-related deaths in Scotland, focusing on prevention, treatment, and the socio-economic factors contributing to these issues.

The root cause, however, for all these violent and self-harming sins is that we have turned our backs on our God and Creator. Being born in sin and shapen in iniquity, mankind relishes the things of the world rather than the things of God. Reliance on the things of the world for happiness and security will always result in disappointment and despair, and consequently a temptation to turn to self-destruction and violence. It is a matter of great thankfulness that the restraining grace of the Holy Spirit influences so many in our land to live outwardly as good citizens with a measure of morality. However, more than that is needed to stem the tide of sin, to bring peace to men, and to please God. Nothing less than the new birth will suffice, giving new hearts and right spirits that will love God and desire to keep His commandments, including, in this instance, “Thou shalt not kill”, with its requirement to preserve our own life and the lives of others. It is when the Prince of Peace rules over us and within us that these dreadful and sinful causes of loss of life will be overcome.

IMPACT OF NO-FAULT DIVORCE ON MARRIAGE

Prior to April 2022, when the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act was introduced in England and Wales, couples seeking a divorce had to prove either that their spouses had committed adultery, or that there had been some form of desertion or unreasonable behaviour, or that there had been a separation for a minimum of two years with both parties consenting. If only one party consented, the requirement was five years. While not reaching the biblical standard of lifelong commitment to a relationship which God has laid down in His Word “from the beginning”, this at least gave couples time for reflection on their marriage, and perhaps time to effect a reconciliation.

However, since 2022, under this new law, parties can divorce inside six months without having to give a reason and the decision cannot be contested by either the husband or the wife. As a result, divorce applications reached a new high. Legal statistics reveal that over 33,000 divorce applications were received in the immediate three months after the law was enacted. The removal of previous grounds for divorce was ostensibly to “decrease . . . potential confrontation” and included a statutory five-month period as an opportunity “to reflect and turn back”. David Gauke, the then Justice Secretary, when announcing a consultation on the bill, stated that he was “increasingly persuaded . . . that what we have at the moment creates more antagonism than we really need”. He added ironically, “I don’t think the best way of helping the institution of marriage is by putting bureaucratic hurdles in the way of a divorce”. Little consideration was given to God’s law or to solemn vows made before Him.

As one commentator put it, this new legislation is having a “hugely damaging effect on society”. Marriage is obviously weakened and “until death us do part” is replaced by “until one of us has had enough”. Tim Dieppe of

Christian Concern speaks of the damage done to children of divorced couples: “These proposals mean that one partner can impose divorce on the other . . . forcing them to move house and break up the family. This amounts to ‘unilateral divorce’. . . . Studies have shown that children do better with married parents, even if those parents are in conflict. No one seems to care about the effects on children and vulnerable women of making one-sided unilateral divorce legal.”

Thomas Pascoe, of the Coalition for Marriage, warns that although those in favour argue that their reforms are compassionate, in reality they are simply trivialising marriage and reducing its status “to that of a tenancy contract”. He adds: “No-fault divorce is really ‘no-reason’ divorce, it undermines marriage by allowing anyone to walk away from their commitments, fully supported by the state, at any time without having to give a good reason”. Another commentator concludes: “Rather than benefiting couples, the measure will ‘benefit’ only one – the one who wants a divorce for no other reason than that he or she wants it . . . this is simply another step on the road to abolishing marriage”. Of course, the sad reality is that no one benefits. It is breaking God’s holy Word which states clearly, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matt 19:6). And again: “But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery” (Matt 5:32). Ultimately, adultery and wilful desertion which cannot be remedied by church and state are the only Scriptural grounds of divorce. There is therefore a knock-on complication when it comes to establishing the legal evidence as to whether or not a divorcee has a Scriptural right to remarry as the innocent party.

Until 2006 the divorce law in Scotland was similar to that in England and Wales, but at this point a change came in. Desertion as a reason for divorce was removed and the periods of separation required were reduced to one year with both parties consenting, and two years when only one consented. Technically Scottish law does look for some proof of irretrievable breakdown and so there is the possibility of a “fault divorce” but in practice the door has been opened so wide that more and more cases are cited as “no fault”. In England and Wales, the new regime has led to the Courts coming under immense pressure to deal with the sheer volume of cases. From October to December 2023, there were over 23,000 applications – 75 per cent coming from sole spouses. The Law Society President claims, that as a result, the justice system is at breaking point. Clearly, while the pressures on families and society are lamentable, what is of paramount importance is what the Word of God has to say on the matter. “For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away” (Mal 2:16).

INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA ABUSES

Scripture proclaims that man was made in God’s image (Gen 1:26), and therefore with an immense capacity as rational creatures to grow in knowledge. In his first temptation, the Devil tempted man to aspire to “be as gods, knowing

good and evil” (Gen 3:5). By nature, fallen man does not seek after the knowledge of God, but after the knowledge of almost all else besides. This is evident from man’s incessant pursuit after knowledge and progress, and nowhere is this pursuit more evident than in the realm of information technology and communication. The world wide web only commenced operation in 1991, and as recently as 1993 only had 25 websites. By 2020, the quantity of data created, captured, copied, and consumed globally amounted to 64 zettabytes (meaning that 64 billion terabyte hard drives would be needed to store this amount of data). By 2022, there were 1.9 billion websites and 4.95 billion users. The “web” has revolutionised how people access and share information, communicate with one another, and make purchases. In many areas of life it has been a useful invention.

However, evidence of fallen man’s corrupt appetites is also apparent on the “web” and its social media offspring. Hard on the heels of positive progress has been a deluge of deceit, misinformation, filth and corruption, all housed within that same “web”. Given that the internet has inveigled its way into the lives of nearly every living mortal, we are duty bound to understand its evils and pitfalls, and the effect it has, or can have, on society at large.

These evils include gross immorality. The web is a hotbed of every vice that man’s evil heart is able to conceive, the most common variant of which is pornography. This is said by Quartz, a digital news outlet, to account for 30 per cent of internet data traffic globally. Aside of its contravention of the seventh commandment, it is accompanied by a number of other social ills including infidelity, marriage breakdown, and addiction. The web even finds room for material which even the seared consciences of our nations regard as unacceptable, in the form of the “Dark Web”. This is an anonymous variant of the web which largely escapes conventional regulation and facilitates drug trafficking, money laundering, weapons trading, trading in counterfeit goods and stolen data, human trafficking and child exploitation material.

Another evil is dishonesty. Dishonesty on the web is so prevalent that it has given rise to a new vocabulary: phishing – tricking people into revealing sensitive information; scamming – tricking people into transferring money in exchange for fake promises; spoofing – altering online messages to make them appear legitimate; bots and botnets – software robots programmed to perform malicious tasks; malware – software which infects systems with a view to stealing information or obtaining a ransom; and identity theft – where the good name of others is used to defraud. Notwithstanding the gloss that society puts on this type of dishonesty by giving it modern names, these issues are simply theft in breach of the eighth commandment – “Thou shalt not steal” (Ex 20:15). The FBI reported that global online fraud losses totalled USD10 billion in 2022 rising to \$12.5 billion in 2023 – which ultimately everybody pays for.

Yet another evil is found in covetousness. While there may initially have been legitimate promotion of social cohesion by use of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and other social media sites, they are now largely “online brag books” whose role is usually to portray a worldly and glamorous

lifestyle, guaranteed to make the viewer envious. These social media sites create unrealistic expectations about life, give rise to body image concerns, lead to cyber bullying and “fear of missing out”, create a reluctance to communicate “face to face”, and promote ungodly lifestyles. This is quite at odds with Scripture, which has a different view of what is desirable: “But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word” (Isa 66:2). In short, these social media platforms have developed into a fruitful field for self-promotion, pride and envy, and it is hard to understand how a humble follower of Christ will be at home in such an environment.

The last and most prevalent category of evil relates to the immoderate use of the web and in particular social media. According to ChatGPT, the “average person” in the UK spent 6 hours and 25 minutes online each day in 2023. This, of course, includes legitimate and unobjectionable work and research. If we narrow the query further, to time spent on social media, then the average is 2 hours and 31 minutes each day, which is a good deal longer than most spend in prayer or reading their Bibles. Access to the web and social media is part of the problem. It costs very little to obtain access, it involves little personal commitment, it is possible to access it on a myriad of technical platforms (for example, mobile phones, tablets, laptops, PCs) and it is available 24 hours a day. The net effect of all this is that our exposure to the world has become incessant, at the expense of considering the welfare of our never dying souls. This is very far from “redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph 5:16).

It is true that the heart of man is so deceitful and desperately wicked in every age and circumstance that abstinence from all internet and social media use will not in itself generate holiness. Nothing less than the new birth and the supplies of sanctifying grace by the Holy Spirit from Christ are able to accomplish this. As noted, there is much usefulness bound up with certain aspects of internet use, for the paying of bills, communication with others, and remote purchasing, for example. Yet Scripture directs us to cut off the right hand that offends us (Matt 5:30), and if people cannot trust themselves to use the internet legitimately, then they ought not to hesitate to take all possible steps to limit their ability to access evil on it. Therefore, it is, at the very least, incumbent on us to use the internet judiciously and with care, not to expose ourselves to online temptation, to exercise discipline so as to avoid immoderate use of it, to limit access by those who are vulnerable, and to use such online protections as are available. At the same time, there is great need to plead for an outpouring of the Spirit, such that the evil and temptations bound up with the web would be vanquished and that it might become more and more a “help” to the gospel rather than a “hindrance”. Scripture’s requirement that we “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thess 5:22) necessitates that we keep this virulent avenue of worldliness at arm’s length.

POLITICAL AND LEGISLATIVE INJUSTICE

God’s Word tells us that we are not to be surprised when we see much wickedness in the high places of our land: “If thou seest the oppression of the

poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for He that is higher than the highest regardeth: and there be higher than they” (Eccl 5:8). God commands that all who are in authority should rule justly and keep His ways. Civil magistrates, such as King David, are commended by God when they rule in this way: “And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people” (2 Sam 8:15).

There is increasing evidence of injustice and a lack of fairness in policing, government, and the judiciary in our land. It was not long ago that there was a widespread perception that, for the most part, all the citizens of the United Kingdom were treated equally under the law; and that similar offences would be punished equitably, irrespective of religion, race, sex, wealth or political views. That perception has been eroded in recent times, and very markedly so since the present Government came into power in July 2024. Anti-immigration riots that arose in August 2024, in the wake of the stabbing and murder of children in Southport, were, at least in part, fuelled by the perceived preferential treatment of illegal immigrants over British people. The Government came down very hard and fast on the rioters. Many were quickly jailed for long periods, some for the relatively minor offences of simply viewing the riots or making social media posts. At the same time the Government had ordered the early release of nearly 2000 prisoners, many of whom had committed serious violent offences. So great was the disparity in punishment of some of these riot offences and often much worse offences committed by others, that it gave rise to the term “two-tier justice”, and that in regards to both policing and sentencing. Part of the reason behind the disparity seems to be that many in the judicial system, police and judges, have the same woke, left-wing, ideological commitment as the Labour Government, and therefore felt unrestrained in giving vent to their prejudices. Promotion within the judicial systems seems to be significantly influenced by a commitment to implementing DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) policies. Hard data on judicial fairness is difficult to come by as the Home Office do not release criminal offence data in a form that would make for rigorous comparison. The evidence is largely anecdotal and picked up from media reports of policing and sentencing. For example, some of the judges that were involved in sentencing the rioters have a history of letting convicted paedophiles off with a reprimand. A recent addition to what has come to be called the “two-tier justice” system has been promulgated by certain judges who determine that offenders be treated more leniently if they have broken the law, but in a particular cause which “the judge may consider fashionable”; for example, the “Just Stop Oil” pressure group. This injustice is further encouraged by the Sentencing Council for England and Wales in the new guidelines which take effect in early April. Prior to sentencing, judges are required to consider leniency when the “offender is from an ethnic, cultural or faith minority, pregnant or post-natal, sole or primary carer for dependant relatives or if he/she considers that one or more of the following may apply to the offender: they have, or may have,

addiction issues or have disclosed that they are transgender”. Irrespective of the availability of hard evidence, the great danger is that the perception of unfairness undermines respect for the law. This can only lead to a further breakdown in trust between the people and authorities. “The prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up” (Mic 7:3).

Another instance of the police showing double standards is in the way in which various public demonstrations are permitted to go ahead, week after week, with the banners of proscribed organisations flying, calling for the death of Jews and the destruction of the nation of Israel, while Christian street-preachers are arrested or moved on from recognised areas dedicated to free speech. While not a few serious and violent crimes go unattended by the police, they seem to be highly responsive to complaints about those who were quietly praying in the street outside abortion clinics, some of whom were in fact arrested. In the meantime, the murder of unborn infants is itself legalised. Our leaders in Church and State condemn the actions of some individuals but not others, and our judges impose long sentences on some but are overly lenient towards those of a similar persuasion to themselves. “Therefore have I made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept My ways, but have been partial in the law” (Mal 2:9).

In Western society, we have become so used to untruths told by politicians that we tend to expect and excuse them, forgetting that a lie is a serious breach of the ninth commandment and merits God’s righteous judgment as well as condemnation by those in authority. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves, presumably to enhance perception of her qualifications for her Cabinet role, claimed on her *curriculum vitae* to have worked for the Bank of England and HBOS as “an Economist”. Due to criticism, this was subsequently updated to “retail banking”. *The Times* reported her actual role as “running a customer relations department dealing with complaints and mortgage retention”. On several occasions, when in opposition, Keir Starmer, Angela Rayner, Rachel Reeves, Liz Kendal and an army of Labour MPs stood with the Waspi women campaigners to promise that if they won the election they would “deliver fair and fast compensation” to them. Many of these women would have voted Labour based on these repeated promises, and yet the new Government announced that it was reneging on that firm election promise. Bribery of individuals and corporations has reached such proportions that those who ought to know better are accepting gifts which blind their minds and eyes in judgment. There are a number of such examples: Sir Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, is reported to have benefited from £3,000 worth of free concert tickets from a firm which subsequently received £45 million worth of Lord Mayor’s City Hall contracts. He declared the concert as “a work event”. The circumstances are currently under investigation. Several Cabinet members, including the Prime Minister, accepted “clothing grants” from a millionaire supporter, Lord Alli, who was given an access pass to 10 Downing Street and is said to “have the ear of the Prime minister!” “Thou shalt not

wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous” (Deut 16:19).

CONCLUSION

In light of the deplorable moral and religious condition of our land, we have all the more need to join with Daniel in confessing our sins and in pleading with the Lord, “Cause Thy face to shine upon Thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord’s sake” (Dan 9:17).

SABBATH OBSERVANCE COMMITTEE’S REPORT

Convener: Rev R MacLeod

“BUT the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14).

It is admitted even by atheists that man is incurably religious. It would be well for society if that meant that man was a Sabbath-observing Christian, worshipping God in Christ and learning of Him in the way of that sweet believing which is the delight of God-fearing Protestants. Having lost our Sabbaths as a kingdom, we have lost the belief of Jesus Christ as the “Lord even of the Sabbath Day” (Matt 12:8).

A common sight on the Christian Sabbath is of one who chooses to spend the Sabbath roaming in the city parks rather than attend the public worship of God. This is of the earth, earthy, of the senses, “sensual, not having the Spirit” (Jude v19). Another common spectacle is men and women riding bikes into the countryside rather than attending the public worship of God. We pity them, riding into a Christless eternity with the wind in their hair. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). Others pass the door of our church on the Sabbath when the congregation is gathering and they think, “Oh the poor benighted people gathering to church. We are the enlightened ones. Sabbath-keepers are the miserable – the unenlightened ones. They are in bondage. We are free. We feel the excitement of the lively city calling; they must be dead who cannot feel the thrill of it.” But the Bible says that Sabbath-breaking is earthly. Their wisdom is folly. Their freedom is bondage. The light that is in them is darkness. “The things of the Spirit of God: . . . they are foolishness unto them.” “They know not, neither will they understand, they walk on in darkness” (Psa 82:5), and we pity their folly. If people who break the Sabbath Day did not have souls to care for, it would be well with them. They would die “like the beasts that perish” (Psa 49:12) who have no conscious eternity to prepare for.

The principle determining and governing the choice of the class of people represented above, operates (largely) on an individual level without injury to anyone else. But when the same dark, God-dishonouring principle determines the way a nation is governed, the result is tragic.

Law-makers in Westminster (to whom “the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness”) are devising means to terminate the earthly lives of the elderly and others, whose existence has been made miserable through diseases and pains. We can bring an end to the suffering of a wounded animal by killing it kindly. But to legislate to terminate the life of a human being as we do to animals, is the nadir of darkest inhumanity. The Bible which teaches “the things of the Spirit of God” teaches us that one who is old and suffering is not to be looked on as a perishing beast but a precious immortal soul. Ending one’s earthly life deliberately and willingly is contrary to the Christian principle of the sanctity of human life. It is tragic to discover that our law-makers would even be discussing assisted suicide. Death does not terminate the existence of a man’s soul. The sixth commandment refers to the sanctity of human life: “Thou shalt not kill” (Ex 20:13). Tragically “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”, and we weep because of it.

The moral fabric of the United Kingdom was at a fork in the road when the economic advantage of using God’s Day to buy and sell was being discussed. Had our rulers then chosen to put a hedge about the Christian Sabbath and encouraged all of our late Queen’s subjects to attend diligently upon Protestant public worship on that divinely appointed day, then her Majesty’s subjects would have greater opportunity to have learned how to live righteously, suffer patiently, and die triumphantly. The law-makers of that period took the wrong fork, provoked God, discouraged the practice of attendance at public worship and the biblical teaching delivered there, with the result that today, a large number of our King’s subjects do not know how to live righteously, suffer patiently, nor die triumphantly.

Correspondence

Letters were sent by this committee to the managing directors of all large parcel courier companies, asking them not to make deliveries on the Lord’s Day, reminding them of their responsibility to God to “remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy” (Ex 20:8). Some replies were received which insisted on their responsibility to their customers who now expect deliveries on God’s Day.

Calendar

The theme of the 2025 calendar was the earnest contendings for the Sabbath by prominent figures around the time of the Disruption in 1843. It was well received by the people of the church and a total of 244 calendars were sold: 75 from the Glasgow congregation and 169 were sold through the Bookroom. It is the Committee’s intention to produce a calendar for 2026.

The publication of Willison on the Sabbath

Work has progressed on the republication of John Willison of Dundee's work on the Sabbath. This work was described by J C Ryle as one of the two best books on the Sabbath. The Committee hopes to publish it in two parts. We are presently working on the first part which addresses questions related to the defence of the Sabbath.

**JEWISH AND FOREIGN MISSIONS
COMMITTEE'S REPORT**

Convener: Rev D A Ross

FOR a number of reasons, Jewish and Foreign Mission Committee reports have an abiding interest for our people, not least in the hope of hearing about gospel advances into the kingdom of darkness, the power of the gospel causing sinners to flee from the kingdom of Satan and cast in their lot with the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Christ Jesus. This continues to be the desire and earnest prayer of all the Lord's people and will be, to the end of time.

In the mercy of the Most High, we continue to receive reports from our Mission of those brought to close in with Christ as their Saviour and thankfully throughout our Church and we believe also in the visible Church world-wide. Although a day of small things, nevertheless there is joy in the Kingdom of heaven over one sinner that repenteth, and may we be blessed to have more and more of that joy.

While our Church in Zimbabwe continues to display the banner of the gospel, it is not hampered by war, as is the case for our congregation in Ukraine, when they no longer can meet in the church building for public worship, communion seasons and the possibility of meeting church visitors. However, this does not mean that our church people in Africa are free from problems. One of a number of trials is a food crisis which is among one of the worst of judgments to befall any nation. One charity organisation reporting on the food crisis in Zimbabwe mentions also mass unemployment, power cuts, high inflation, water shortages, and so on. In the good providence of the Lord, our Mission has been able to help our own people in Zimbabwe, this much to the joy of our people where afflicted by food shortage, and continues to be done very efficiently through our Deacons' Courts which identify those in need and mission administration acts to provide that need. There was a surplus of £20,000 from a previous famine appeal in the year 2019 and, along with aid from Mbumba Zending and other sources, the needy were sufficiently provided for. We are humbly thankful to the Lord that we on this occasion have been in a position to help those in poverty. At the same time, we do feel for the thousands of others outwith our Church, in their ongoing struggle for survival, and make it a burden in prayer for the relief of those in such terrifying

circumstances. By the grace of God, we are not forgetful of the direction set by our Lord Jesus to the question, "Who is my neighbour?"

While we have reason to rejoice in the continuance of the work of the gospel in our Mission, it saddens us that our activities in Israel are no longer ongoing and our presence has come to an end. It was indeed very trying for Rev John Goldby that due to illness he could no longer continue with the work of the Mission in Israel. However, this does not mean that the work already done, such as the preaching of the gospel and the production of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* in the Hebrew language, is not bearing fruit and may continue to do so. While at the moment we are unable to have a presence in Israel, we are there in spirit in the knowledge that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jam 5:16). Mr Goldby continues to have contact with persons with whom he previously worked, which may yet prove useful for any gospel work which in the providence of the Lord we may be blessed to rekindle. The revision of the Delitzsch New Testament which Mr Goldby was heavily involved in is now entirely under the administration of the Trinitarian Bible Society and is near completion.

Israel, we are well aware, is surrounded by deadly enemies. There are those who earnestly pray to their god for the annihilation of the Jewish race. It is our duty to pray more earnestly for these war-torn lands that the gospel of peace will bring these warring lands to be brethren in the Lord Jesus Christ. May our gospel input into that part of the world be much blessed to this end.

Regarding the ongoing work of providing Bibles for our Mission in Africa, a donor in Holland has provided 60,000 Bibles to be sent over a period of time and for distribution throughout Zimbabwe. We as a Committee are deeply indebted for such a rich provision. However, while it is our pleasure to distribute in the extended regions of our congregations and institutions and beyond where possible, to distribute throughout Zimbabwe our time and facilities could not cope. It will be the function of other organisations to distribute to these areas.

Our early beginnings in Africa 120 years ago, began by a single lone preacher, Rev John Radasi. It was in fact a marathon task to establish his first place of worship at a place called Bembesi about 40 miles east of Bulawayo city. Many have been the ups and downs of our church in Zimbabwe since then but at the moment there are 6 sanctioned charges with 46 formal places of worship, 2 ministers, 32 Elders, 9 Deacons, 432 Communicants, and a Divinity Student. There are also institutions established for many years, such as schools, a large hospital, four clinics and an orphanage. Due to the large number of persons in our institutions, and who attend our places of worship, the number of hearers across all the congregations at various times will be in the region of 3000. It is worthy of note once again that these institutions have in a number of cases been the means for some persons and families to settle in our Church as their spiritual home. It is a pleasure to witness some families from generation to generation attend the worship of our Lord Jesus Christ. To the present we do not lose sight of the valuable contribution to learning, caring

and health in institutions undergirded by Christian ethics: the infinitely higher blessing for residents, workers and visitors is the declaration of the gospel of Christ. This has brought for many (as has often been noted in previous reports) the eternal blessing of a saving interest in the Saviour.

We are mindful also that our Mission could not operate without the valuable skills of able workers on the Mission Field – from local persons and skilled persons from other countries. Those in prime positions supply reports for the Synod and these reports you have at hand and speak for themselves and there is no need here to relate what is already in these reports.

There is too the input of the Foreign Missions Committee and the valuable input of the General Treasurer and our Co-ordinator. There is of course the constant necessity for the support of donors. Our Dutch friends have excelled in that work over many years. There are many others besides, for which we give thanks to the Lord. The Lord certainly did not forget the widow who gave her last mite: in fact, very few rise to that high devotion of giving.

I would like to make a further note about the support we receive from our friends in Holland who have shown this by their liberality yet again. In January this year a deputation from the Jewish and Foreign Missions Committee met with a deputation from the Mbuma Zending Committee in Leerdam, Holland. The purpose was to discuss the projected costs of new building, maintenance and other matters on our Mission. After discussion, the Mbuma Zending Committee promised the requested amount of 1,500,000 euros. This includes not only funds for the Mission's institutions but also for some of the needs of the Church congregations. We felt our words inadequate to express the deep appreciation felt by our committee to these long-standing supporters of our Church and institutions in Zimbabwe.

Much more could be said in connection with the Lord's gracious provision over many years. But finally the main matter of thanksgiving: despite our many faults and failings, our infinitely gracious God leaves our Mission with "the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Rom 1:16). Many of the people who support our mission work in Africa initially think of the labour related to the "handmaids", such as schools, hospital, clinics and the orphanage. But it is the spiritual work associated with these and the 46 places of worship scattered over a wide area that is our primary concern.

There have always been African people who make valuable contributions to the spiritual and material welfare of the Mission. We are also mindful of others who leave their home country to give much of their life to the ongoing activities of the Mission. It is a great work of mercy to many that the institutions of the Mission continue to provide the blessings of education and health, but above all it has been the means of adding to the Kingdom of Christ, in that people who have never previously come into contact with the sound teachings of the Word of God have come to find Christ as their Saviour.

We have the usual reports for the Synod from the Heads of the institutions: Mr Ncube, Headmaster, Ingwenya High School; Dr Anneke Snoek, Principal

Doctor, Mbumba Hospital; and the Administrator of the Thembiso Children's Home. It is also cause for thankfulness that these Heads have able persons to do their work in their absence.

REPORTS OF ZIMBABWE CONGREGATIONS

BULAWAYO

Rev S Khumalo

WE have reason to be thankful to the Most High, for His kindness and forbearance, Who has spared us and given us some measure of health to carry on the day-to-day duties. When we see the year coming to an end, and another begun, with a thankful heart we say, "The Lord hath been mindful of us". The work of the gospel went on uninterrupted throughout the year, with all our preaching stations kept open, namely: Lobengula, Nkulumane, Mahatshula, Umguza and weekly prayer meetings at Thembiso on Tuesdays and Lobengula on Fridays.

Despite the rise of false teachings and the gospel of prosperity that has drawn the attention of most of our young people, it is especially pleasing to see some young people who escape these snares to seek the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the salvation of their souls as revealed in His Word and under the preaching of the gospel of grace.

If there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents, how much should we be encouraged when we witness our young people turning from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sin. It brings joy to us. Several young men, all former John Tallach High School students, many of whom are studying at the local University, have come forward with concern for their souls, seeking baptism or to sit at the Lord's Table. Four were accepted for baptism, including a Thembiso employee, and four were accepted for full membership. We pray that the Lord by His grace will keep them and bless them, if it be His will, that they be useful in His vineyard.

Communion were held in Bulawayo in June and December, and we are thankful that the attendance was good despite most of our young people having relocated to other cities or countries. Our hope is that the seed sown will remain in them until the Lord in His will makes it to live in them. Some years back, the Bulawayo congregation was mostly comprised of young and middle-aged people, but now we see a great change as most people are ageing. Death has also not spared our congregation; pews are left vacant. We pray that the Lord may raise up some to take their places, especially among their families.

A container of Ndebele Bibles was received from the TBS and these are being distributed near and far in different places. The recipients have received them with great appreciation. We are thankful for this donation as people who

had no Bibles now have the Word of the Lord in their homes. We pray that the Lord will bless the Word received, that they may search it and find Christ and His saving power.

As the Bulawayo congregation, we would like to thank the JFMC, the Church and friends abroad who gave generously to the “famine relief” during the difficult year, where little or nothing was harvested. “But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:19).

In conclusion, we would like to thank the Lord in granting His people grace to pray for the prosperity of the work of the gospel and their liberality in giving to His cause. “For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth” (Isa 62:1).

INGWENYA

Rev S Khumalo

“His name shall endure forever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed” (Psa 72:17). When we look unto ourselves, we faint and are discouraged, but when we look at the promises of God, we are strengthened and encouraged. The work of the gospel has continued since the establishment of the church at Ingwenya by the late Rev J B Radasi in 1905. The work has not been without challenges. The hand of the Lord has been visible ever since till this day. It is that which makes us thankful to the Most High for His faithfulness to His promises.

As we come to the end of the year, we reflect and thank the Lord that the gospel is preached among our people every Sabbath and at weekday prayer meetings. Communion is held at Ingwenya in March and September and in Cameron in July. Ingwenya has four stations under it, namely Cameron, Gadade, Insiza and Inyathi. There are four elders and Mr B Ncube, an assessor elder, who supply in these stations. Services are held in all these preaching stations apart from Inyathi, where there are difficulties because of old age and the great distances of walking to the church as most congregants are elderly people. For those who do walk to church, Mr T Ndlovu keeps the doors open, and he does visit in their homes those who cannot come to church occasionally, to conduct worship. The shortage of professing men has affected us in filling vacancies of office bearers, with most office bearers now aged. It is our prayer that the Lord will raise young and faithful men to be of use in His vineyard. Above all, we are thankful to the five elders and professing men for keeping the doors open every Sabbath and for weekday prayer meetings. I also, as the interim Moderator for Ingwenya, do visit Ingwenya to supply there, and occasionally the other preaching stations. Death and illness have not spared the Ingwenya congregation. During the year, we lost through death one of the elders from Inyathi, who due to illness had relocated to Mbembesi to be

looked after by his son as he was widowed. The other two elders, Mr S Ncube at Ingwenya and Mr H Ntakana at Insiza, are not well, but we are thankful that Mr Ntakana's health has improved, and with the help of other professing men, they keep the doors open every Sabbath.

It is encouraging to see the blessing by the Lord of the work of the gospel to the students. As I mentioned in the Bulawayo report, these young men's interest in the gospel started at John Tallach School. The purpose of the school's teaching and the preaching is that the blessing of the Lord may result in the students having these spiritual benefits of being part of the congregation. We have seen before how the Lord blessed the work of the gospel with the late Rev Z Mazvabo, the late Rev N Sibanda and now the Divinity Student Mr K Mpata.

As the Ingwenya congregation, we would like to thank the JFMC, the Church at large and friends overseas who have contributed funds to the "famine relief" to mitigate the effects of the drought last year, which affected the country and our communities. Food was distributed together with maize seed. We would like to thank all to whom the Lord gave the grace and heart to give to this cause. We hope this year will be better than the past year as the rains have been good, albeit with uneven distribution and some periods of heatwaves. This led to some in affected areas having to replant. Draught [animal] power was also a challenge for many, with some livestock succumbing to the drought in some areas.

Despite all the challenges we face, we are thankful that the doors to the means of gospel of grace are wide open and the opportunities are abundant. We should in a thankful way join with the Psalmist in prayer: "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Psa 130:3). In conclusion, what we need most is that the Lord would send labourers into His vineyard. "Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good" (Psa 122:9).

MBUMA **Rev S Khumalo**

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The witness on the side of Christ was carried on throughout the year in all our congregations under Mbuma. This witness has been since the time of Rev James Fraser. Like the Apostle Paul who said, "To you is the word of this salvation sent" (Acts 13:26). That has been the message that has continued to sound in all our pulpits both on Sabbath and at weekday prayer meetings. As it is now, Mbuma is vacant, and I am the Interim Moderator. I am thankful to the Lord that despite the lack of a resident Minister, the Lord's work continues unabated. The evidence of this blessing of this work is seen by the fruits of it.

Mbumba has 17 preaching stations which stretch from Gwampa valley to the south, and across the Shangani River to the north. There are seven elders and one deacon. Services are held in most of the stations, where elders, with the help of professing men and catechists, help to keep the doors open. Where this is not possible, services are held alternately. The work of the catechists in the community has helped many to understand and differentiate between the true doctrine of the Bible and the false doctrine of men. Additionally, the Sabbath school has proved to be effective among the youths, as we are seeing many young people showing concern about their souls as they seek baptism before the Kirk Session. Through the hospital outreach and the new clinics that have been opened, this has helped the church to gain more ground in propagating the Word of God and to counter the false teachings that have darkened many spiritually. We are thankful for the work done by the catechists under the supervision of the Kirk Session and in conjunction with the hospital.

Two communions are held at Mbumba, in April and October. At both communions the attendance has been very good. People from all the preaching stations under Mbumba congregate, and the church becomes too small to accommodate everyone. It brings a thought of a need to extend the church building. During the year, a few young and old people came forward to seek baptism and full membership. In all this we say: "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchmen waketh but in vain" (Psa 127:1).

The Bibles donated by the TBS have been and continue to be distributed to all people within and beyond our community and working boundaries. Our institutions have become the effective doors of opportunity to spread the Word of God as people come to the hospital from far away – areas which we would otherwise not reach – they return with a Bible or having heard of the only Saviour Jesus Christ and about the importance of having faith in Him for the salvation of their souls.

On behalf of Mbumba congregations, I would like to thank the JFMC, the Church at large and friends for their generous help in time of need, due to the shortage of food caused by the drought in the past year. Our appreciation goes for maize seed also, which helped many grow crops to alleviate the food shortages. It is all in the Lord to grant the grace of giving in the hearts of His people. "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 124:8).

ZENKA

Rev S Khumalo

When one enters the Mission compound at Zenka, one is overshadowed by big trees, which in the early years of the church is where the Communion services were held, with people gathering under the shade of the trees. On the day of judgement, these trees could testify against many who rejected Christ and Him crucified as set forth in the everlasting gospel that was declared by His

servants under them. Zenka has no resident minister: as such, I am the Interim Moderator. Zenka has five preaching stations and at Zenka, communions are held in February and August. There were four elders but one was removed through death. Thus three remain, with one of them, Mr W Nkomo, appointed Home Missionary. I am thankful for that as he is very helpful.

During communions, large crowds gather, especially on the Sabbath days, and it is very pleasing to see such a number from the community coming to hear the gospel. One other challenge that affects Zenka is the issue of transport to visit the remote preaching stations in the farms. The roads are so bad that they have been abandoned by most vehicles. Fudu, Mabayi, Katasa and Zenka are regularly supplied every Sabbath day. The farm's preaching station is the one yet to be visited, due to inaccessibility, but thankfully there is a professing man who keeps the doors open. In the work done at Zenka, we are thankful to the Home Missionary and other elders, who help keep the doors open for worship.

Like all the other congregations, the Zenka congregation would like to register its thankfulness to the JFMC, the Church at large, and friends who have generously contributed to the Drought Relief efforts, where mealie meal and maize seed were distributed. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich" (2 Cor 8:9). What we are more thankful of is that we have the gospel with us that was bequeathed to us by those who have gone before us. "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for He is faithful that promised" (Heb 10:23).

NKAYI

Rev S Khumalo

"A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench" (Isa 42:3). Nkayi brings back memories of the establishment of the first Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in the 1920s by Mr John Mpofu and his son Mr A Mpofu. It is with thankfulness that the grandchildren of Mr John Mpofu are still holding on to the truth they were bequeathed by their parents up to today.

Nkayi has five preaching stations, namely Nkayi, Mathetshaneni, Manomano, Nkuba and Donsa. Of these, four are supplied from Nkayi as Mathetshaneni, Nkuba and Manomano have no professing male members. Just before the year ended, the elder at Nkuba passed on. It is indeed a burden to the elders in Nkayi, most of whom are in their old age, to travel to supply these stations. The elders at Nkayi are: Mr J B Mpofu, Mr C B Mpofu, Mr S B Mpofu, Mr J B Moyo, Mr L Sithole and Mr B Tshabalala. It is amazing that Mr J B Mpofu in his old age, above 90 years old, is still active and very much spiritually minded, despite losing his sight. He keeps the doors open almost every week when his health allows. His experience as an elder for a long time means he is dependable in guidance on Church doctrine and practice and ensures these are adhered to.

Nkayi has two Communion, in January and in June, Donsa has one communion season. The resident elder is Mr L Sithole. The area of Donsa has been infested with false prophets, who have swayed many people. We are thankful that there is a remnant that has remained unmovable in the truth. During the communion, it was interesting to see visitors who attended on the Sabbath day. When I enquired about their history, we found that they at one time attended our schools and were taught the Word of God.

On Monday of the communion, the sacrament of Baptism was administered to an old lady that was accepted by the Kirk Session. On Saturday and Monday, Bibles were distributed to visitors, and they were very thankful for this gift. In all our preaching stations, both in Nkayi and Donsa, it is sad that none of the school children attend services from these one-time FP Church-run schools. The cry has been loud, especially in Nkayi with the desire to be brought back under the administration of the church.

The Nkayi congregation would like to join others in extending their thankfulness for the assistance through mealie meal distribution and maize seed which came at a time of need. To the JFMC, the Church at large, and all generous friends, we would like to thank the Lord who by His grace opened their hearts to give. Our main need is labourers. The harvest is truly plenteous, but the labourers are few. "There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us" (Acts 16:9).

ZVISHAVANE (NEW CANAAN CONGREGATION)

Rev T Mwedzi

In the midst of many troubles, with the kingdom of darkness seeming to be advancing and attacking, we are thankful that the Lord has kept His cause amongst the congregation and the areas surrounding Zvishavane, Mberengwa, Chivi and Gweru districts. His grace has been sufficient to sustain us in our weakness through another year.

The doors of the gospel continue to be open throughout our eleven stations with the help of seven elders, of which two are full-time Home Missionaries. Attendance, which had gone down much between 2008 and 2021, slightly increased between 2022 and 2023, but remained stable in 2024. Attendance is affected by migration due to the unstable economy and the rise of false prophets and the "gospel of prosperity". We pray that the Lord will use the remnant as instruments to show and keep the true light. Amongst the elders, Mr Naison Siziba (a retired Home Missionary) has not been well, with diabetes and eye problems. We are thankful to the Lord that he is better now and continues to be of much help giving the Kirk Session much advice. Old age has affected a number of our members who are now not able to attend church services. This has increased the need for home visits by myself and our Home Missionaries. Recorded sermons are sent to members who have smartphones every week, with most of them outside the country and in towns where we do not have services.

Five communions were held within the congregation in the year and the attendance has been so encouraging. The biggest attendance was New Canaan's August communion where 209 were in attendance on the Lord's Day. We thank the Mbumba and Bulawayo congregations very much for always coming to strengthen us during our communions, and Rev Khumalo who is among us on four of the communions. This year we were able to hold a communion in Zvishavane town. It had been impossible to hold the communion in town because of shortage of water. It was made possible this year because a friend funded a borehole at the manse and a 5000-litre tank was put at the church.

Mr Cephas Matara continues to catechise school children at Maware. A donation of money for a borehole by a friend in Scotland has helped a lot. Thirty-four families use the borehole for a nutrition garden and Mr Matara holds Bible classes with them for three days in a week. Towards the end of 2024, the water table was down and there was not enough water, but we hope with better rains this year the garden will have enough water. With the help of the Mission, the roof for the church building at Chiedza, which was timber on asbestos, was replaced with steel trusses and zinc sheets which are not affected by termites. We expect the accommodation wing will be replaced this year. We thank our friends overseas very much for their kindness. Among our main Churches, New Canaan remains with timber under asbestos and is also being affected by termites, and the water collected from the roof is dangerous to health. There is no underground water for a borehole close to the church.

We are very thankful to the Lord for in the year we had the first publication of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* in Shona printed. The elders are finding the publication very useful in understanding the scriptural standards of our faith. We have also resumed publishing the sermons by Rev Mazvabo which are already with the printer. Sermons by Rev D Macfarlane are also being translated into Shona. The translations are used by elders, but are also available to any other member within or outside our Church. Two hundred copies of the *Mother's Catechism* in Shona were distributed to surrounding communities and school children at Maware. A few copies of the *Shorter Catechism* in Shona were also distributed. The demand for the Shona Bible is very high. The only Shona version which can be found in bookshops is the Shona Version of the English New International Version. Our desire is that the correct version be made available to most of the families. Revision of the Shona Psalms in metre is also in progress.

Generally the spiritual condition continues to decline, especially among the youth. Most of them are affected by drug abuse and alcohol abuse. Single-parent families continue to rise due to divorce. Apostasy among mainline churches is also on the rise. It is our prayer to the Lord to revive us so that we may call upon His name once more (Psa 80:18).

JOHN TALLACH HIGH SCHOOL REPORT

Mr N Khumalo, Acting Deputy Head

THE school has continued to try to achieve its mission as an active Christian institution, that is, to impart sound Christian values to students, teachers, parents, workers, and the community.

We continue to appreciate donations of Bibles, good books for the school library, and TBS *Golden Thoughts* calendars. Students are encouraged to read a good book at least every fortnight. This helps in the teaching and learning environment and inculcation of Scripture reading as a culture.

Bible knowledge

The Bible Knowledge (BK) department has had its challenges though. Of particular note is the filling in of a second BK teacher slot. Mrs Nienke Mpata, who was assisting in Term 2, left for Scotland together with her husband, who is a Divinity student. In Term 3, Mr Khulekani Dube came in but was later transferred to Mbuma Primary School. There is, therefore, still a vacancy for a second Bible Knowledge teacher which we trust the authorities are still working hard to address, all in the Lord's Providence. The BK department members are: Mr B Ncube (Headmaster), Mr N Khumalo (Acting Deputy Head), Mr O Moyo (Boarding Master) and Mrs M Khumalo. These conduct lessons in either the mainstream school timetable and Sabbath School or both. Only one member is a full-time BK teacher.

Enrolment

Enrolment in Term 1 of 2025 was 610 learners: 309 girls and 301 boys. Day learners are 27 and boarders 583. Our Resource Room has 5 pupils; four boys and one girl. These are visually impaired and they all use braille.

Examination results

The 2024 Advanced and Ordinary Level local public examination results came out a bit early this time around. The results were released two weeks apart as usual. The Advanced Level Results were pleasing, showing further improvement in quality. The pass rate was maintained at 100%. Ordinary Level results pass rate was 98%, which marked another improvement from the previous year, where the school recorded 95%. Another positive was a slight increase recorded in the number of students registering for Cambridge International Examinations. Parents indeed faced financial challenges because of the state of the economy but managed to sacrifice and commit towards registering their children for this Examination Board.

“O” Level CIE results (Cambridge International Examinations)

The JFMC pays Cambridge Religious Studies examination registration for all Ordinary Level candidates. The situation is still the same where there is no

longer a suitable equivalent syllabus offered by ZIMSEC. This gesture is appreciated, it helps us teach Scripture-oriented Religious Studies and our students have a great interest in the subject.

Religious Studies: No of candidates: 84 Pass rate: 97%.

The results have been steadily improving since the Covid period, showing the positive effects of effective teaching. The Ordinary Level candidature was less this time because of low student retention, caused by an exodus of professionals from the country and economic challenges.

Finance

The school had its fair share of challenges financially. In February 2024 prices shot up both in USD and ZiG (local currency). Furthermore, in May, after the fees had been collected, of which the majority of the savings were in the local currency, the ZiG fell from \$1:13ZiG to \$1:26ZiG overnight. The school lost about US\$38,000 equivalent, due to the fall in exchange rate at that time.

Developments

No development projects were approved for funding in 2024 by the Mission. Our wish is to engage in sustainable projects in the next few years, that will help the school in its quest to fund its future projects and absorb perennial economic shocks, all God willing.

Conclusion

The school, through fostering a reformed teaching environment, has been able to maintain exacting standards of discipline in both students and workers. These are, however, being challenged by the changes in the legislature. It is bending away from the Word. The conservative view which favoured Christianity is slowly eroding. Thus, there is need to “watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (1 Cor 16:13) in the face of the adversary. We therefore need to continue to do nothing without God’s guidance.

MBUMA MISSION HOSPITAL REPORT

Dr A Snoek

2024 has been a year of drought. Although Zimbabwe did not experience severe hunger, the effects of the drought were painfully felt. During the first quarter the number of severely malnourished children increased drastically, and two young lives were lost. In the second quarter we saw a substantial number of patients suffering from infestation with parasitic worms and its complications due to nearly empty and contaminated wells. During and after the winter period the number of elderly patients who died was much higher

than previous years and this is thought to be caused by frailty due to an unbalanced diet. In the third and fourth quarter large numbers of cattle died, furthering the economic instability and impairing the food security of many households.

With a very low health worker-patient ratio the workload remains high. We are therefore thankful for the strength and perseverance the Lord gave to our staff to deliver the much-needed care and for the help we got from volunteer nurses and doctors from overseas. Their professionalism and charity have been much appreciated.

Administration and finance

Financially the year closed with a healthy balance, due to the steady increase of hospital fees, increasing the sustainability of MMH. In July and October 2024 a container with donated goods from the Netherlands arrived. Besides equipment and supplies for the hospital, furniture and educational materials for the mission schools were received.

Maintenance and projects

Buildings

Re-roofing continued in New Makhaya, whereby 33 grass roofs were replaced by zinc roofs and the houses extended with verandas. Several other houses for hospital, clinic and school staff were repaired and painted, besides the addition of four flush toilets and four septic and soak-away tanks. The roof of the house of the Headmistress at Mbuma Primary school was found to be destroyed by white ants and was replaced.

In Simbo an ECD (Early Childhood Development) classroom was erected near the Primary school with the help of the community. During the building of the clinic, the original ECD classroom of the school was converted to the Antenatal Dormitory. Electrical trunking of the buildings and staff houses in Simbo was installed and is awaiting connection to the grid.

Part of the fence around the school gate in Mbuma continued to be vandalised. Over a distance of 300 metres the fence was reinforced with razor wire and it has not been damaged since then. Contractors and sub-contractors completed construction of the new maternity ward and pharmacy in August, a project which was commenced in October 2023. Furnishing is on its way and the official opening is expected in 2025. The courtyard of the hospital received a makeover by repaving and adding trees and flowers.

Water

The borehole in Zenka suffered from silting and was cleaned. Unexpected items like old engine blocks were removed from the mud, which must have been thrown into it more than 30 years ago. After the cleaning and the purchase of a new submersible pump, now it produces an ample amount of water again.

Transport

The lorry, staff car and quad bikes continued to function well. The ambulance was having an increasing number of faults and was due for replacement in December 2024. However, no donor was found yet, wherefore the necessary maintenance was done and the replacement postponed to 2025. A donation for a tractor was received and the old tractor was replaced by a new Massey Ferguson from a company in Harare.

Maintenance of the roads around Mbuma has not been done by the responsible authorities for ages. Therefore with the aid of the tractor and the help of manpower from the community the roads to the hospital, clinics and schools were kept in an accessible state.

Electricity and generators

Despite several attempts to assist the ZESA (Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority) team with transport to enable them to do the necessary repairs, mains electricity continued to be absent during the rainy season. Twelve new panels, four batteries and one extra inverter were therefore added to the solar system of the hospital, making the total power capacity 27kW. The two boreholes got extra panels to increase the yield when the pumps are powered by solar energy.

The generator continued to break down and the cost of repair turned out to be more than its value. A donation for a new generator therefore was sought and received.

Staffing

Two Nurse Aides returned after their training as Primary Care Nurses (PCNs) and two more PCNs were deployed to Mbuma.

The new posts of Hospital Food Supervisor and Accountant were added to the complement and filled. ZACH (Zimbabwe Association of Church Related Hospitals) replaced one PCN by another PCN. Five Volunteer Nurses from the Netherlands came to assist for periods between three months and one year. A maximum of three nurses have been present at the same time. Medical help was received from a Dutch gynaecologist who came three times for a period of two weeks and from a Belgian paediatrician who came for three weeks.

Due to disciplinary reasons one staff member was transferred to Nkayi District and one staff member dismissed.

One Catechist left to become the Medical Superintendent of Thembiso Children's Home.

One General hand, who had been working in Mbuma faithfully for 19 years, retired.

Great was the grief when on 28th December one of our Nurse Aides, Ritah Mhlanga, died, who had been working at Mbuma since 2008. She was a hard-working colleague, who gave up much of herself to allow her children to get decent schooling. She went to South Africa to get the necessary treatment, but passed away there, leaving her husband and six children behind.

The number of staff members for Hospital and Clinics at 31st December 2024 was as follows:

Payroll	Number of staff members	Payroll	Number of staff members
Government	82	ZACH	3
Mission	15	Global fund	2
Nurse Volunteers	3	Total	105

Beside these 105 cadres, there are 195 Community-based Care workers in the villages around the hospital and the clinics, who voluntarily assist with disseminating health information, basic care at home, tracing of defaulters, weighing of under-5s and detecting health and social problems.

Hospital and Clinic services

In 2024 the number of admissions remained the same, but the death rate increased from 11.2% to 13.5%, most likely due to the above-mentioned effects of the drought.

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Admissions	1,860	1,936	2,002	1,991
General	775	871	863	859
Paediatrics	205	268	267	236
Maternity	833	802	801	821
Neonatal	47	50	71	75
Deaths	127	134	131	158
General	121	124	123	140
Paediatrics	4	4	4	8
Maternity	1	0	1	1
Early Neonatal	6	6	8	9

The number of outpatients visits increased by 25%.

Out Patients Department	2023 All	2024 Mbumba	2024 Lutsha	2024 Vova	2024 Simbo	2024 All
New Clients	10,380	10,010	2,260	1,224	2,051	15,545
Repeat visit/ Chronic Clients	7,446	4,503	789	1,284	179	6,755
Total	17,826	14,513	3,049	2,508	2,230	22,300

Preventive services	2023 All	2024 Mbuma	2024 Lutsha	2024 Vova	2024 Simbo	2024 All
Antenatal/Postnatal Clinic attendances	2,939	1,268	727	594	309	2,898
Child Welfare Clinic attendances	11,730	2,786	3,258	4,043	1,580	11,667

Total Births	2023 Mbuma	2023 Lutsha	2023 Vova	2023 Simbo	2024 Mbuma	2024 Lutsha	2024 Vova	2024 Simbo
Live births	810	43	27	16	774	43	26	14
Still births	14	0	1	1	9	0	1	0

2024	Still birth			Early Neonatal Death			Maternal Death		
	Fresh still birth (FSB)	Mace-rated still birth	Total	<2.5kg	>2.5kg	Total	Hospital	Home	Total
Hospital	5	4	9	5	4	9	1	0	1
Clinics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The number of perinatal deaths decreased from 2.68% in 2023 to 2.10% in 2024. One maternal death happened very sadly: a patient who died from post-partum haemorrhage after an abruption of the placenta.

Theatre/Labour ward	2022	2023	2024
Caesarean section	102	138	125
Other operations	229	251	235
Dental services	79	86	74

	2022	2023	2024
Radiology services			
Number of X-rays taken	3,631	3,539	3,372
Number of Ultrasounds Scans undertaken	918	1,150	1,263
Laboratory services			
Number of lab tests	16,707	8,714	7,195
Number of HIV tests	1,433	807	1,141
HIV incidence in ANC (antenatal clinic)	4.1%	2.1%	1.9%

IOC and TB services	Mbumba	Lutsha	Vova	Simbo	All
Total no. of patients on ART (antiretroviral treatment)	622	454	382	271	1,729
Total no. of patients diagnosed with TB	571	1	1	1	574

Newly diagnosed non-communicable diseases	2021	2022	2023	2024
Hypertension/Cardiovascular disease	37	39	14	61
Diabetes Mellitus	12	12	10	24
Cancer	57	73	87	77

Environmental Health Department			2024
Number of newly diagnosed TB cases			561
Number of sputum positive (for TB)			54
Number of sputum negative			470
Cure rate			97%
Multi-Drug-Resistant TB cases			2
TB patients who are HIV positive			165
Number of malaria cases (test positive)			0
Number of malaria deaths			0
Water, sanitation and hygiene programme			
Number of toilets built			64
	No. of households	Households with toilets	% Coverage
Ward 13 (no Rural Health Clinic (RHC))	780	408	52.3
Ward 14 (Simbo RHC)	916	517	56.4
Ward 24 (Lutsha RHC)	647	467	72.2
Ward 25 (Vova RHC)	906	472	52.1

The relief of physical ailments continued to be accompanied with care for souls. The catechists of the hospital and the clinics untiringly made use of opportunities to reach out to their fellow-men. During the community meetings and other meetings in and out the facilities, topics are discussed which are derived from the Bible. Examples of these topics are baptism, obedience to God, the Word of God, culture and many others. The catechists report:

“On baptism it is important to note that many people who become part of the discussions in relation to this topic view baptism as efficacious in the removal of sin. The topic generates a lot of heated debates on the error that without baptism, none can be accepted of God. Also or because of this view, many are very particular about immersion as a method of baptism. They say baptism is not baptism if immersion is absent. We hope with time and scripture-based teaching, baptism will be considered rightly: necessary as commanded by the Lord, but not efficacious to take away sin. That is only done by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ – and this is what is taught.

“Another interesting topic is obedience to God. There is always the general belief that what the Word of God commands does not necessarily mean that believers should endeavour to obey it to the letter. Note that we are aware man is fallen and cannot obey God in every dot. But this is not what is meant here. The generality of the people hold the view that God’s commands were never meant to be fully obeyed. It is something like ‘we must know them, but we must not be too worried if we fail to keep them’, and, this is interesting, one thinks it is even more so for people in Africa. People say that they cannot follow God’s commandments like believers of yesteryears. However, the Word of God demands obedience from every believer.

“But there is some hopeful news to report. This has to do with the Word of God over against culture. There is now a general consensus that the Word of God takes precedence over culture. And there are even developments in our communities that seem to confirm that people really mean what they say. There is the Sabbath and the cultural day where people refrain from going to their fields. It is pleasing to report that more people who go to any church no longer obey the day of culture. They keep the day of worshipping the Lord.

“There is one worry though. The number of people who now totally disregard the day of culture has emboldened even those who do not observe any day from the Word of God, so much that this group has ceased to have a day of rest at all. They disregard their culture and disregard God’s command.”

Much work is still to be done, but the Lord has done great things for us; whereof we are glad.

THEMBISO CHILDREN’S HOME REPORT

Mr B Dube, Home Superintendent

Introduction

As we come to the end of another year, we are reminded of the words of the psalmist, “Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy” (Psa 82:3). This is one of the fundamental truths of true religion. We are thankful the Lord has provided in time the shelter of such and all the provisions as we reflect on the past year. We are grateful for the opportunity to serve as a family to the precious children in our care. We are

honoured to be a part of God's plan to provide love, care, and support to those who need it most.

Mr B Maphala retired in September, and I assumed duty after two months of induction. I acknowledge the work done by my predecessor, and look forward to doing my best to continue the good work and improve where I can to bring further success to the Home.

The Home

There are 22 children, 5 girls and 17 boys. We have three operational houses, namely the Youth House, and Family Units 4 and 5. All our children are in good health, attending school at various levels and institutions of learning. There are 9 children at secondary level and 13 at primary level.

Gospel propagation

At Thembiso Children's Home we value the Word of God as the place was established on this foundation. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov 22:6). In addition to morning and evening worship, now we have Saturday lessons where Mrs P Dube the Bible Knowledge teacher leads interactive lessons that explore biblical values and principles, helping our children to grow in knowledge.

Released from care

Three boys reached the age to leave the Home during the year.

Education

Most of our children did not perform well. At primary level only three performed above average. At secondary level only two passed with five subjects. We have three children who sat "O" Level. Only one passed with five subjects. All of our children without any exception are encouraged to work extremely hard.

Staffing composition

We provide 24-hour care and support to our children, through six caregivers. We also have eight security guards (two stationed at Lobengula Manse) and two gate keepers.

Conclusion

Thembiso Children's Home is more than just a place of care, it is a family and a beacon of hope for children in need. We are dedicated to our work and look forward to continuing to make a difference in the lives of our children.

ZIMBABWE MISSION ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Mr T B Mpofu

Introduction

OUR gratitude is to the Lord Almighty, who in His loving kindness has allowed us to complete yet another year in time. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness" (Lam 3:22,23.)

Board meetings*

All the three boards, namely Ingwenya, Mbumba and Thembeiso, and the Head Office Committee continued to meet regularly during the year. The Mbumba board held eight meetings and the Thembeiso board held nine meetings, whilst the Ingwenya board held seven. The Head Office Management Committee held seven meetings during the year.

Staffing

We started with 40 people on the Head Office payroll, these include the Ministers, Home Missionaries, Head Office staff, administrative staff at Thembeiso Children's Home and Mbumba Mission Hospital, Bible Knowledge teachers, Catechists and watchmen. At the end of the year we had 38, due to the retrenchment of the Thembeiso Children's Home (TCH) Administrative Officer and the retirement of the Superintendent, whose replacement was by someone already on the Head Office payroll. We have faced some labour relations challenges with the retrenchment mentioned above. The matter was eventually resolved.

Rev Khumalo continued as the Interim Moderator at Ingwenya, Mbumba, Nkayi and Zenka charges, which remained vacant.

Expatriate staff

Dr A Snoek remained the Medical Superintendent at Mbumba, with Dr C Brobbel as a Medical Officer and Sr Geurtsen as Matron.

Finances

The General Treasurer sent monthly remittances in US dollars. Additional funding was requested and received to meet the increased wage bill due to a salary increase following a new Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) between the Workers' Union and the Employers' Association. With a very tight control on expenditure, we managed to complete the year within budget.

Following a poor rain season, there was a severe drought in 2024, and money for food relief was requested and received from the Jewish and Foreign Missions Committee. Two rounds of food relief were done, and the third round

*This includes two Bible Knowledge teachers each, for Zenka and Mbumba, and one Bible Knowledge teacher each, for the other schools.

was for seed. Food and seed were distributed to the vulnerable members within our congregations. One more round of food relief will be necessary to mitigate food shortages before the next harvest. At the moment it is difficult to predict how the harvest will be, as the rains, though much better than last year, have been sporadic, and most farmers did not plant in time.

Sustentation fund

Contributions to the fund continue to go down in most congregations. Ingwenya had the most significant drop, from \$1,120.85 the previous year to \$177 in 2024. The numbers in the Ingwenya congregation have decreased over the year and it is mainly composed of the elderly who are unemployed. Overall, contribution to the fund went down by 13.5% from the previous year. There was a decrease in contributions in all congregations, except for Mbuma, where there was an increase of 29%.

Below are the figures from the various stations:

Station	2022	2023	2024
Ingwenya	\$2,382.17	\$1,120.85	\$177.00
Bulawayo	\$2,038.78	\$1,816.00	\$1,725.00
Mbuma	\$1,144.00	\$1,125.00	\$1,451.00
Nkayi	\$174.00	\$60.00	\$152.00
Zenka	\$300.00	\$290.00	\$210.00
Zvishavane	\$1,018.00	\$1,082.81	\$1,040.00
Total	\$7,056.95	\$5,494.66	\$4,755.00

Schools

Bible Knowledge (BK) lessons for BK teachers with Rev J B Jardine continued monthly. Although the Catechists from Mbuma were added to the classes, they did not attend most of the meetings. In addition to their normal lessons, children in the five primary schools do the Scripture and Catechism Exercises. For the 2023-2024 Scripture and Catechism Exercises the table opposite shows the number of children who received prizes. Mbuma received the highest number of prizes.

Section	Marks	Ingwenya	Lutsha	Mbumba	Thembeiso	Zenka	Total
Junior	95-100	25	4	5	6	0	40
	90-94	13	19	18	26	2	78
	85-89	11	19	15	15	17	77
Upper Primary	95-100	11	26	57	27	0	121
	90-94	11	17	17	24	5	74
	85-89	11	9	12	9	10	51
Lower Primary	95-100	5	10	29	36	43	123
	90-94	11	11	21	18	28	89
	85-89	9	9	21	13	12	64
Total		107	124	195	174	117	717

The major challenge in all the rural schools is the payment of school fees and levies. The schools employed a variety of methods to collect fees, without excluding children for non-payment (as this is against the government policy). The first option has been to agree on a payment plan with the parents or those responsible for payment of fees. If that fails, the community leadership, the School Development Committees (SDCs), debt collectors and court orders, are some of the methods that are being used to recover unpaid fees and levies.

Schools' statistics

All the schools showed improvement in the Grade 7 results. Thembeiso remained the best of the 5 schools and had a 10% increase compared to last year. Though Lutsha improved, it still had the worst pass rate, with only 28% of candidates managing to get a full certificate. Mbumba also had a pass rate of less than 50%.

			Grade 7 Results				
School	Enrolment	Staffing	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
Ingwenya	331	12*	65%	34%	11%	50%	6%
Lutsha	640	23*	28%	8%	24%	13%	13%
Mbumba	706	27*	36%	30%	26%	12%	17%
Thembeiso	479	18*	90%	80%	86%	83%	73%
Zenka	851	23*	77%	50%	50%	40%	58%

OVERSEAS COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev D A Ross

REPORTS of the Overseas Committee (previously known as the Dominion and Overseas Committee) arose from some of our church people migrating and settling abroad while at the same time anxious to establish the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in their new homeland. This arose from a genuine desire to worship God according to the Scriptures. They were steeped in Bible teachings from an early age and were familiar with the *Shorter Catechism* and *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Those Church people, having cast their lot in far off lands, never cast off their upbringing in the Scriptures, and were in constant contact with the Church in Scotland, so that ministers would give them supply for some months of the year.

The wish of our people was not ignored by the Church in Scotland and deputies, along with elders, were sent to New Zealand, Australia, America and Canada. From that early period, by the grace of God, generations down to the present time never lost a taste for doctrine, worship and practice as founded on the Word of God. Indeed, once settled in their new abode, they were joined by other people, though strangers, yet were like-minded with themselves and eventually formed into congregations of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland and continue to this day as our brethren in the bonds of the gospel. True, there were those from these generations who were not of the same mind and drifted away from the godly heritage of their predecessors, but thankfully there remain those who sincerely adhere to that heritage.

The Church in Scotland followed with keen interest this section of our Church overseas, ever mindful to send help by way of deputies, and to this day we continue as the one Church, the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Although divided by sea and land, yet we are bonded by the teachings of the Word of God. Also the fact that we meet once a year at Synod time, where all our ecclesiastical concerns are expressed and spiritual bonds revived, is a blessing we enjoy. While human relationships are beautiful, they only last for a time, but those in the gospel last for eternity.

The Overseas Committee continues, where possible, to supply deputies for the preaching of the gospel to overseas congregations. This sadly is near impossible due to the fewness of ministers and the added burdens which thereby fall on the few. A number of those who were asked and were willing to help were not in a position to be able to help. Also, there are now four ministers in overseas congregations, and other congregations have interim moderators from the home church, and this puts these congregations overseas in a stronger position than some congregations in the home church. Nevertheless we are aware of the great worth of sending deputies to our brethren in distant lands, not least to preach Christ and Him crucified but also to bring back to the Synod reports which we believe are a means of strengthening the ties between the home church and congregations overseas.

There are of course reports to the Synod from ministers residing in overseas congregations which are very profitable for the whole church. Perhaps also interim moderators from the home church to overseas congregations should bring reports to the Synod of these congregations under their care. No doubt such reports have a great worth by way of binding the whole church in ecclesiastical affairs and strengthening our unity in the gospel.

Also, we are glad to record that Rev Iain MacDonald has agreed to do deputation work for the Overseas Committee while assisting the interim moderator of the Chesley Congregation. Mr MacDonald will provide a report for the Synod. For this the Committee is deeply appreciative.

Another matter for the Lord's blessing in the supervision of the mission station in Odessa is the provision of a person to engage in the work of spreading the Word of God and Christian literature. This was done in the past by the late Mr Igor Zadorozhnyi, an elder in the congregation, and we mourn the loss, yet are glad regarding the great gain for him. Mr Zadorozhnyi's work, we trust, will continue, but we need someone suitable for the physical work connected with spreading the Word. At the moment we have located, we believe, a suitable person who, while not making a public profession, seems suitable to engage in the work of sending out Bibles and Christian literature. While, of course, Rev Dmytro Levytskyi attends to spiritual matters which arise, this person would carry the load of organising and forwarding literature requested, as well as manual work connected with the mission. Mr Levytskyi's usual report is before the Synod.

The Committee appreciates also the amount of translation work done by Mr Alexander Macarie. Last year he translated the *Shorter Catechism* into Romanian. Printing and distribution of the same is done in Odessa. Distribution however, has proved near impossible due to the war in Ukraine. The intention now is to send the Catechisms in one lot to Romania for distribution which we hope will be more successful. Mr Macarie has completed the translation of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* into Romanian, but has yet to add the proof texts. He also translated the Westminster Assembly's *Form of Presbyterial Church Government*; and the *Directories for Public and Family Worship*, all which the Committee will consider for publication.

In all, enough has been said about our Committee work, but we crave the earnest prayers of our people regarding the worst time in the history of our Eastern Europe mission: the relentless and exceedingly cruel war in Ukraine. Millions have fled the country and some also connected with our congregation. We are very thankful that the Levytskyi family have remained for the sake of the cause of Christ. May times of much blessing be in store, when God shall have mercy on Zion. "Thou shalt arise, and have mercy on Zion" (Psa 102:13).

EASTERN EUROPE MISSION REPORT

Rev D Levytskyi

THE year 2024 started with a massive drone attack that lasted for 11 hours. Because of this attack in Odessa, a young boy died and three others were severely wounded. Residential buildings were ruined, and seaport infrastructure was damaged. This is what can be described as a typical day in Ukraine in 2024. It is the second year after the full invasion of Russian forces into the sovereign territory of Ukraine when atrocities of war got into full swing. Such war crime scenes as Bucha or Irpin became memorials and began to be forgotten since the lives of the people moved on in the desperate struggle to survive. Many lost their families, homes and health, and for many it is beyond recovery.

This year was marked by the death of the elder of the Odessa Congregation, Mr Igor Zadorozhnyi. This became a great loss for our Congregation as well as for mission work since the expertise and eagerness of Mr Zadorozhnyi in mission work was remarkable. The years of his work as a missionary in spreading sound biblical literature among his fellow citizens proved that the Most High put him to that work. Our prayer to the Lord of the harvest is to raise such men so that this work would be continued to His glory.

It is God's mercy that we exist and worship as a Congregation. We worship in two locations, Odessa in the Mission House and in Roksolany at our home.

It is a sad fact that people rely on material things and put their hope and trust in other people without trusting and hoping in the Lord. During these years, it became obvious that while Ukrainians are too superstitious, they lack elementary biblical knowledge. Even in this time of national distress and calamity, it is our duty to continue spreading the Word of God to sinners throughout Ukraine so that they might be saved through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Eastern Europe Mission has sent by post the following items:

1. Family Bible in Ukrainian – 192 copies
2. Family Bible in Russian – 12 copies
3. *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Ukrainian) – 24 copies
4. *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Russian) – 10 copies
5. *Sermons by Rev D MacFarlane* -12 copies
6. *A Catechism of the History and Principles of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland* – 12 copies
7. *An Exposition of The Westminster Confession of Faith* by R Shaw – 24 copies
8. *Line Upon Line* by F L Mortimer – 65 copies
9. *Memoir and Remains of Rev Donald MacDonald* – 12 copies
10. Calendars 2025 – 2,000 copies

The Odessa Mission Station continues to receive free donations from Ukrainians, and the amount for compensation of postage expenses in 2024 reached £120. These funds were enough to pay for postal and operating expenses for the distribution of literature, the purchase of postal envelopes and postage stamps, photocopier paper, tape, ballpoint pens, and the annual rental of a post office box. The remainder of funds for postage throughout Ukraine by 1st January 2024 reached £619.86. The Door Collection in 2024 amounted to £200.

We sincerely thank the Trinitarian Bible Society for supplying biblical literature for distribution among Ukrainians.

This war reminds us of our sinfulness and need for God's mercy. Donations from individuals and congregations provide the necessary funds to continue the important mission in Eastern Europe. May the Most High bless all who participate in this work through donations and prayers to proclaim the gospel of Christ to sinners in Ukraine and throughout Eastern Europe.

It is our appeal to the Church: Brethren, pray for the cessation of war in Ukraine, but especially for the blessing of God on our gospel work. "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days" (Eccl 11:1).

TRAINING OF THE MINISTRY COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev D W B Somerset

THE transmitting of the Gospel to the next generation is a great part of the work of the Christian Church. Abraham was commended for his faithfulness in this: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him" (Gen 18:19). God is often described as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex 3:15; Matt 22:32; Acts 7:32). The training of ministers is therefore a matter of great importance which the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland commits to tutors, under the immediate oversight of the Training of the Ministry Committee.

Students

The Church presently has two students for the ministry, Mr Keith Mpata under the Zimbabwe Presbytery, and Mr Neil Campbell under the Southern Presbytery. Dr Alan McSeveney was licensed by the Southern Presbytery during the course of the year, while Mr Velani Moyo ceased to be a student under the Zimbabwe Presbytery. Mr Mpata is just completing the second year of his Divinity course under Rev Allan MacColl in Dingwall, and Mr Campbell is presently engaging in preliminary studies with a view to commencing the Divinity course this September.

Theological conferences

The 2024 Theological Conference was held in Glasgow in October and was well attended. Once again, the technology worked well for the online paper which was delivered by Rev G Macdonald in Australia. This year's Conference will be held in Inverness on Tuesday 28th and Wednesday 29th October, DV. The following speakers and subjects have been agreed:

1. Mr J Freeke on "The Doctrine of Alexander Comrie"
2. Rev J B Jardine on "Good Works" (*WCF*, chapter 16)
3. Rev J D Smith on "Israel and the Church"
4. Rev D W B Somerset on "Typology"
5. Dr A H Ross on "The influence of Societies (SSPCK, GSS, etc) on the Spread of the Gospel in the Highlands"

Rev K M Watkins has agreed to act as Chairman.

We continue to seek the prayers of the Lord's people for the ongoing work of the Committee and for the tutors and Divinity students. "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance" (2 Pet 1:12-15).

THEOLOGICAL TUTOR'S REPORT

Rev A W MacColl

THIS session the theological classes in New Testament Greek and cognate subjects have been held in Dingwall with the second-year Divinity student Mr Keith Mpata in attendance. The classes began on Friday 6th September 2024 and since then our meetings have taken place in the mornings from Tuesday to Friday until late March.

New Testament Greek and Theology: The course has closely followed the pattern of previous years, embracing New Testament translation and exegesis, and some wider areas of New Testament studies where we attempt to give a brief overview of New Testament Introduction, Canon and Inspiration, Hermeneutics and Textual Criticism, referring to various standard authors in each of these areas. The whole New Testament section of G Vos' *Biblical Theology* was also covered. This year we have also been able to pay even more attention to the doctrine of inspiration than in previous years, looking especially at some of William Cunningham's and B B Warfield's writings on this vital subject.

The Scripture portions translated and discussed have been taken from all four Gospels, along with chapters 3-8 of the Epistle to the Romans, and some passages in the Epistle to the Philippians and in the Book of Revelation. More than in previous years we read extensively in Professor John Murray's commentary on Romans in conjunction with other commentators. The exegetical skill and theological acumen displayed in that work are admirable but Murray's agreement in various places with modern textual theories was noticed with disapproval. It is regrettable that a scholar of such ability and evident piety made concessions to critical theories of the sacred text notwithstanding his early background in the Free Presbyterian Church. We did not cover quite so many Greek passages as in former years but the emphasis has been on trying to develop the linguistic and logical skills needed for Scripture exegesis and homiletics. We have tried to build and consolidate the student's grasp of basic Greek grammar using J Duff's *Elements of New Testament Greek*, which has been comprehensively revised over the session. We have also referred to D A Black's intermediate textbook at a few points during the final period of the course.

Each week the student has produced a short introduction to the various books of the New Testament to provide some consideration of the wider historical and literary context of the inspired text and also to discuss the general structure and content of each New Testament book. A sermon outline based on the New Testament books in consecutive order was produced every week. Furthermore, an essay was prescribed in the first semester dealing with the importance of language studies in Scripture interpretation and a full exegetical paper on the Epistle to the Hebrews was produced during the second semester.

While it neither serves for edification nor for much practical benefit to delve into the debates of contemporary New Testament scholarship, a very brief notice has been taken of a small number of issues, such as the so-called "Synoptic problem", also "Form Criticism" and the so-called "New Perspective on Paul", as well as the relatively modern textual theories. Our method has been to outline the particular issue as succinctly as possible and then to refute the error by stating the orthodox position, with the object of allowing the student to give a polemical refutation of such erroneous views. The subject of eschatology as taught in the New Testament was also treated briefly.

Catechetics: The course in Catechetics involves the study of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* and we have paid particular attention to the Scripture proof texts supporting the positions set forth in our subordinate standard. Robert Shaw's *Commentary* has been consulted throughout. At times we have made reference to some of the best writers in the field of Systematic Theology when further comment on a subject was required, drawing most frequently from the *Institutes* of Francis Turretin. It was a wise arrangement of the Church's previous tutors that the Catechetics course was kept separate from the year spent studying Systematic Theology. This arrangement not only allows us to study the Confession in its own right, but it either serves to prepare

students for the course in Systematics or helps to consolidate their grasp of doctrine if they have already undertaken that part of the three-year curriculum.

An additional feature of the Catechetics course this year is that we read through all the ancient ecumenical creeds of the early Christian Church and briefly discussed them. As in previous years, the Apostles' Creed was set as an item for memorisation. We additionally discussed the Scots Confession of 1560 as part of the historic doctrinal witness of the Reformed Church in Scotland.

Church Law and Polity: We looked at the doctrine of the Church with the help of lecture notes by the late Rev H M Cartwright which have been kindly printed in a class booklet through the good offices of Dr R J Dickie. These notes distill the essence of Scottish Presbyterian ecclesiology, drawing largely upon the works of Calvin, Bannerman and Cunningham, but also referring to Gillespie, Professor Murray and others. We then moved on to look at the Westminster Assembly's *Form of Presbyterial Church Government* and also considered Thomas Witherow's *The Apostolic Church: Which is It?* The Church's *Manual of Practice* was also examined in conjunction with a further series of most helpful notes produced by Mr Cartwright. Finally, we also studied the first two parts of James Durham's *Treatise Concerning Scandal* where the author deals with the nature of offence and the duty of the Church in relation to discipline.

English Bible: The whole New Testament is covered for the student's examination in the English Bible and a number of passages were also selected for memorisation.

Mr Mpata has worked very diligently throughout the extensive course of studies we have sought to cover. He conducted a number of services in my own congregation for which both I and the congregation are grateful. I took the opportunity to listen to his conducting of public worship on more than one occasion and Mr Mpata has been able to take services in quite a few of our Scottish congregations, in each of the home Presbyteries. This, in addition to being able to attend some communion seasons, has enabled him to meet a considerable number of the people in Scotland. It would be good to maintain and strengthen the links between Scotland and Zimbabwe and we hope that Mr Mpata's time here may help in that regard.

Mr Mpata's wife gave birth to their second child in January in the Netherlands and the final part of his course has been conducted online from the Netherlands since his UK visa expired in February. While we are grateful that the technology enables us to conduct the classes at a distance when there is no alternative in providence, a prolonged period of online theological training is clearly inadequate and cannot be compared with the interaction and oversight which occurs through face-to-face tuition.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank Ds A van Voorden of Leerdam for agreeing to give of his time from a busy schedule to invigilate four of Mr Mpata's exit examinations due in April. The help of Mr Treur, one of the deacons of that congregation, in agreeing to invigilate the other exam paper is

also to be noted. The kindness of our Dutch brethren in this matter will be appreciated in the Free Presbyterian Church in both Scotland and Zimbabwe.

We must acknowledge the goodness of the Lord in carrying us through the period of our time together in health. Although the labour and responsibility involved in the classes are no light matter, the opportunity to discuss the Word of God and its doctrines and principles has been a pleasure and a privilege for me. I trust that Mr Mpata will be helped to pass his examinations and that the Lord will help him in his final year of studies and, in due course, make him a discerning and faithful servant of Jesus Christ in the great and vital work of the gospel ministry.

WELFARE OF YOUTH COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev J B Jardine

It is the remit of the Committee to promote the spiritual interests of the young people of the Church. This is particularly necessary but also increasingly difficult in a society that is becoming increasingly secular in its outlook. It is with sadness that we note the decline in the numbers of young people in the Church compared to past generations.

The main aspect of the Committee's work is to oversee the setting and marking of the Scripture and Catechism Exercises. This continued in 2024 both in the UK and Overseas. Our Mission Primary Schools in Zimbabwe face a number of challenges and yet they seek to prioritise the exercises. A report by Mrs D Mpofu, Education Officer, appears at the end of this report. The lack of a designated Bible Knowledge teacher at John Tallach High School has also led to challenges in completing the exercises but we are thankful to the members of staff who have stepped up to assist with this work. We would take this opportunity to thank those who set and mark the Scripture and Catechism Exercises in the UK, Zimbabwe and overseas. The time and effort that they put into the work is greatly appreciated. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov 22:6).

A second aspect of the Committee's work is the annual Youth Conference. The conference in 2024 was well attended with 51 young people from various Church backgrounds being present, and we hope it proved profitable to all involved. Feedback was certainly positive. The Committee would like to thank those ladies that assist as house mothers and especially Miss Shona Gillies who retired this year from being a house mother.

It is hoped, God willing, that the Conference will go ahead this year at Strathallan from 9th to 11th April with the following papers:

- **James Renwick** – A Noted Covenanter by Mr F R Daubney
- **What Is so Special About the Authorised Version?** – What We Ought to Know About Our Bible by Mr D P Rowland

- **Defending the Faith** – Reasons for Believing the Truth by Rev Roderick MacLeod
- **Guided Tour to Blackness Castle and Linlithgow Palace** conducted by Rev D Campbell
- **Can the Christian Church Continue?** – The Gates of Hell Cannot Prevail by Rev K D Macleod
- **Joseph** – Lessons from His Life by Mr R W van Kralingen

The Committee would encourage the young people of the Church and their parents to come forward with any ideas that they might have to make the Conference more beneficial to all, including ideas of topics for future papers. “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young” (Isa 40:11).

REPORT ON SCRIPTURE AND CATECHISM EXERCISES 2023-2024 IN ZIMBABWE MISSION SCHOOLS BY MRS D MPOFU

Introduction

This report provides an overview of the performance of our learners in Bible Knowledge, summarizing the outcomes from the three exercises.

Performance outcomes

All the exercises were written in English and below is the performance of each school. The figures represent average percentages obtained in each exercise.

Grade	2			3			4			5			6			7		
	Exercise			Exercise			Exercise			Exercise			Exercise			Exercise		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Ingwenya	72	95	100	86	95	96	83	87	80	90	81	92	96	93	93	97	100	96
Lutsha	91	71	93	82	83	89	82	77	74	89	85	86	78	90	78	87	61	77
Mbumba	93	96	98	85	94	96	86	96	88	92	89	93	94	81	81	76	60	77
Thembiso	98	98	100	91	94	100	98	96	98	96	96	90	88	100	95	89	92	93
Zenka	68	90	99	84	93	93	58	37	96	69	59	82	69	55	81	90	77	98

Taking the overall results into account, all schools performed well, which was good. Thembiso got 100% in Lower Primary in both Grades 2 and 3. Ingwenya also got 100% in the same level in Grade 2. This is commendable.

Prize-winner List

The learners who scored 85% and above received the prizes. The table below provides a comparative analysis of the number of learners from all the five Primary Schools.

School	Number of Learners
Ingwenya Primary	115
Lutsha Primary	126
Mbumba Primary	217
Thembiso Primary	142
Zenka Primary	117
Total	717

A Certificate of Achievement was given to these 717 learners who achieved 85% and above.

Each school performed well given their relative sizes, a remarkable achievement given the non-Christian upbringing of many of the children and a credit to the hard work and perseverance of the students, teachers, and staff.

BALLIFEARY CARE HOME REPORT

Convener: Mr K H Munro

THE Ballifeary Home continues to operate amidst many and varied challenges. Worship is conducted morning and evening and we are grateful to all who give help in taking it. It is encouraging to find several members of staff coming to join in the worship with the residents, helping them to find the places in the Bible, and some appearing to show appreciation for the Word. There are earphones available so that those who cannot leave their rooms to join the worship in the sitting room can listen to the Word in their own rooms.

During the year fifteen new residents were admitted to Ballifeary and five left, either to go back to their own homes or to be transferred to other Homes. Sadly nine passed away during the year. There were also two respite care admissions. At the end of December the Home had twenty-three out of twenty-four beds filled.

The care required is becoming more onerous as residents are coming into Ballifeary later in life and many have serious disabilities including dementia; some indeed are receiving the equivalent of nursing care although the Home is classed as Residential. Consequently the workload is becoming increasingly heavy. We are very grateful to those who are willing to carry this load, especially as there have been difficulties in recruiting staff. Such shortages have necessitated the use of agency workers which adds substantially to labour costs. We would be really grateful to hear from any belonging to the Church, or outside of it, who may have an interest in this worthwhile work. The work done by a band of faithful volunteers is also very much appreciated.

Staff undertake ongoing SVQ training and also other training, including Infection Prevention, Emergency First Aid, Moving and Handling, Fire Prevention and Dementia.

Essential maintenance of the property is also ongoing, including painting and kitchen and laundry equipment being replaced.

Seeking to address the staffing problem, in October the Committee raised the wages for hourly paid staff and also reluctantly increased the fees for self-funding residents. The impact of these changes will take time to filter through to the next financial year. Because of the Government's statutory increase in Employer's NI contributions from April there will be further cost pressures which will have to be addressed in this coming year. We are hoping that a higher NHS residential care rate can be negotiated nationally, but we have little or no control over the final figure at the local level.

There was a Care Inspection towards the end of the year which presented a number of challenges. These are being addressed by the Matron and senior carers.

In summary, we are seeking to uphold the Christian ethos of the Home according to Free Presbyterian principles. We are grateful to the Matron and staff for their hard work in maintaining these standards. Above all we should be thankful to the Most High for His care in a difficult day. Vulnerable souls, at the end of their lives in this world, are given the opportunity to hear the Word and only eternity will reveal what blessings flow from that: "Destroy it not: for a blessing is in it" (Isa 65:8).

LEVERBURGH CARE HOME REPORT

Convener: Mr C Finlayson

Introduction

The Care Home is situated in Leverburgh, South Harris, and is a purpose-built residential home, adjacent to the Leverburgh FP Church. It opened in 1988 and was enlarged a few years later. The Home is registered to provide care for up to 17 residents from across the Islands but is currently limited to 15 residents due to staffing constraints. The Christian ethos of the Leverburgh Care Home is well known and adds to its value in the local community.

The local authority is Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CnES) and is the Home's main provider of residents. Its officers are cognisant with the Home's "Residents' Contract" and this helps ensure potential residents and their families know that Leverburgh Care Home maintains Christian standards set by the FP Church.

Services are held on Sabbath afternoons and on Wednesday mornings by Rev K M Watkins or visiting supply. Family worship takes place every morning and evening and, as has been the case since the Home opened, worship is conducted by ministers or office bearers from all the Presbyterian denominations of South Harris. Staff conduct worship in their absence and attend family worship and services when their duties permit: for a number, this is the only occasion they hear the Word of God.

In terms of overall Care Home provision, the facilities in Lewis and Harris are as follows:

Name	Rooms	Operator
Leverburgh Care Home	15	Private – FP Church
Bethesda Nursing Home	30	Private – Bethesda
Blar Buidhe	38	Private – HC One. Closing with imminent transfer to Council homes
Seaforth House	52	Council
Harris House	16	Council

Residents

The Home had a 95% occupancy rate in 2024 with 15 beds available. Sadly, there were 5 deaths during the year.

The feedback from Residents and Families continues to be very good as we strive to provide a safe, contented and active environment within the Christian ethos of operating.

Staffing

At the time of writing, there are 30 staff members on the payroll, a figure which includes part-time, temporary, and relief staff. The Home's loyal staff work long and onerous hours and the Committee is grateful for their dedication and support of the Church's work and witness.

Recruitment and retention of staff is a long-term and major issue with additional difficulties caused in Harris by competition from other, better-paid sectors and a small population pool from which to draw. The work is very challenging given the increasingly complex care needs of residents, an ageing population and a demanding regulatory regime which also adds significantly to the staff training burden.

The National Living Wage and its annual increments are the starting point for determining the various pay scales of staff and all staff are paid above the National Living Wage.

Shift patterns can be difficult for staff members' domestic circumstances, particularly where night shift work is concerned. The Committee records its thanks to staff, who work particularly prolonged shifts to ensure a high quality of care, in the most demanding of circumstances.

Finance

Staff are commended for their efforts in reducing the 2024 deficit to 13% of the previous year's and 25% of the average annual deficit since 2020.

The majority of income is from residents' fees. There are no private (that is, self-funding) residents and residents are mainly funded by CnES based on a rate set by COSLA – the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities – and

always subject to the approval of the local Integration Joint Board (IJB), whose main stakeholders are CnES and the NHS. Negotiations are ongoing with CnES to secure “break-even” funding until March 2027, the end of the current contract period.

The main item of expenditure is staff wages. These are above the National Living Wage and are normally increased annually. There was no annual increase in 2024 due to the ongoing negotiations with CnES but a 2025 increase has been authorised, together with the award of a Distant Islands Allowance from January 2025. The combined impact is an increase of 15%.

Costs are impacted by:

- Occasional use of agency staff at higher rates (60% higher than local) and accommodation costs
- The increasingly complex care needs of our residents at progressively higher care standards
- 2024 UK budget requirements on National Living Wage and National Insurance
- The remote location and wider UK economy leading to higher costs of goods and services

Governance

The Committee is thankful to Leverburgh Care Home staff who have continued to provide high quality, safe and compassionate care for residents while maintaining a strong Christian ethos. The Home is well recognised and valued throughout the Western Isles as a result.

A recent Care Inspectorate inspection has positively underlined the care provided but highlighted a need for improvement in some administrative aspects which staff have worked hard to address. The final report has not been issued at the time of writing but positive and helpful engagements are ongoing with the Inspector.

Closing remarks

The Committee wishes to thank the Matron and staff for their loyalty and dedication throughout another difficult and stressful year, particularly against the background of staffing challenges.

The Committee also places on record its gratitude to Mr Watkins for Sabbath and Wednesday services and others who support and attend to the spiritual welfare of residents.

The Committee acknowledges the goodness of God in maintaining this aspect of the Church’s work and Christian witness. The Committee prayerfully desires that the Lord would bless staff and residents for time and eternity.

“Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Isa 1:17).

OUTREACH COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev D A Ross

“ALL men seek for thee.” These words were addressed to our Saviour by Simon Peter (Mark 1:36,37), and highlight our desire that multitudes of sinners would seek after Christ. Our outreach work is to this end and is needed all the more when it is a day of small things and spiritual darkness is rampant. At such times there is a danger of becoming despondent like Elijah when false religion swept through Israel. But his work and that of other prophets was not in vain nor is our gospel outreach, for the Lord assures us regarding His Word “it shall not return unto Me void” (Isa 55:11).

When the Lord admonished Elijah for his despondency, asking, “What doest thou here, Elijah?” (1 Ki 19:9), He made known to him that things were not as bleak as he supposed. It is not hard to imagine that Elijah would have been uplifted in his soul at this admonition. We too are uplifted in our spirit by responses resulting from sowing the seed of the Word of God in spite of the growing disinterestedness towards the gospel. There are those who pass by, or shake their heads as they did to Christ, nevertheless there appear to be genuine responses to our outreach work.

There are a few contacts in relation to our literature work which reach us from overseas. Some contacts appear enthusiastic and more so when gospel literature is sent. We are deeply aware it is a small drop in the ocean of sinners standing in need of the Word of God. At the same time we are wary of fraudsters and approach certain requests for literature with caution. Occasionally literature goes missing in the post, but who can tell in the Lord's providence whether it may fall into the hand of some person anxious to read the same. We have experienced this in our work of posting literature to Eastern Europe. It is a grief to us that we do so little by way of distribution, but we hope that more ways will keep opening up whereby we can spread the Word, which is the power of God unto salvation.

Our main distribution work is in the United Kingdom. Bible requests are attended to by Rev J B Jardine who informs the Committee of the positive response from a number of Primary Schools. This work with Primary Schools is being gradually increased year by year. Free Bibles also continue to be offered on our Church website. This work is progressing well with a sustained demand for Bibles. Tract distribution also continues. There is an ongoing work to place many of the Tracts on the Church website.

The work of spreading the Word of God is also done through the Book van. The Book van is an excellent method to show our religious wares, especially the written Word of God which appears on all sides of our van as well as on posters around our Book stand. Thereby the Scriptures are starkly in view of thousands of people. Of the passing crowds some stop for a moment to gaze, a few to enquire, while by the actions of others we readily realise that our wares are not attractive to the majority. This indifference has always been obvious since our first activity with the Book van and appears to be more

marked at the present. Sadly, at times we see this even among church-going people. Nevertheless the Word of God continues to be the best-selling book in the world, so obviously there are people out there who purchase the same. The privilege is ours to sow the seed, but the fruit of that is in the hand of our Lord. May we ever accompany this work with the prayer, “Thy Kingdom come” (Matt 6:10).

I will conclude this short report with a note from some of the people who engage in the Book van activities. Mr Christopher Lamont says among other things, “Shows started on the first Saturday of July with the Fettercairn Show and as usual they are well attended and as we display a variety of wayside pulpit texts these are viewed by many people. Unfortunately, there are not many visits to our display of Bibles, a very varied selection of reformed literature including children’s books and learning aids. We had 2025 calendars and many were handed out along with *Shorter Catechisms* and a small number of Bibles. There is always a lot of free handouts on a varied number of subjects of which some were argued against being displayed as they were of a contentious nature. We are always well received by those who have a desire for the spread of the gospel among old and young. We did not attend the Sutherland Show as it clashed with the Caithness Show and also the Lochaber Show as the field was waterlogged and the van was not allowed onto the field.”

Mr Jonathan Wyatt writes, “This year, we were at several shows displaying the Scriptures. The boards displaying the Ten Commandments were in a prominent place and people were confronted with them as they passed by. A few read them and this enabled me to open a conversation. Some were commending us for displaying them. At one show a lady was incredibly pleased to see us displaying the Ten Commandments and I managed to have a long talk with her. She was attending church in Aberdeen and was quoting the Scriptures. At the Caithness Show, a man on holiday from Edinburgh came over to our stand and had a long discussion with us. He was delighted to see us at the event and commended us for our Christian witness. Some people looked at our literature, and one man from Northern Ireland purchased some material and was pleased to see the Christian witness. There were some profitable discussions, but not all points were agreed upon. Several calendars were distributed freely to passers-by. May the Lord bless this work.”

Lastly we appreciate very much the administration done by Miss Norma Morrison, the Church Secretary, connected with our attendance at the Agricultural Shows. May the Lord be gracious to bless this small contribution towards spreading the good news of the gospel.

“The Lord Himself did give the Word,
The Word abroad did spread;
Great was the company of them
The same who published.”
(Psalm 68:11, metrical version)

PUBLICATIONS AND BOOKROOM COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev K D Macleod

THE format of the report is the same as in previous years and focuses on the three areas of the Committee's activities.

Magazines

Both the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* and the *Young People's Magazine* have continued to be issued each month for which we are thankful to the Lord. The Committee appreciate the help given over the past year by all those who have contributed articles and book reviews. The *Free Presbyterian Magazine* and the *Young People's Magazine* continue to reprint important material from the past including articles by William Bridge on "The New Covenant", John Flavel on "Keeping the Heart", and Alexander Moody Stuart on "Jesus on the Sea of Galilee". In addition, the Committee are appreciative of original contributions to the magazines, the editor for his monthly introductory article and Rev John MacLeod's series of two articles on the "Perfectionist View of Sanctification" and Rev Iain D MacDonald's substantial and informative obituary on Rev A E W MacDonald. We have also published, for a wider audience, papers that were given at the Theological and Young People's Conferences. The following two papers were published during the year in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*:

- "The Synod of Dort and the Arminian Controversy" by Jan Freeke
- "Humility: a True Christian Character" by Rev J Bruce Jardine

The *Young People's Magazine* has printed papers given at the Young People's Conference and the New Zealand Youth Conference:

- "John Bunyan" by George B Macdonald
- "Assurance – the Lord is My Shepherd" by Rev James R Tallach
- "John Welsh: A Man of Prayer" by Rev Kenneth D Macleod

As in previous years the Committee and the Editor are very appreciative of the contributions provided by members of the Editorial Board of the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*. The Editor, the Editorial Board, and the Committee seek, by God's grace, to maintain the standard set by previous editors with respect to the spiritual character and thoughtful content of the Church's Magazines. Due to escalating postage costs the Committee has had to increase the cover price of the Magazines for 2025.

Publications

During the year the Committee published *Union with Christ: Sermons of Hugh Martin*. This is an important volume that has been worked on over a

considerable period of time. It is a companion volume to *Christ Victorious: Selected Writings of Hugh Martin* published by the Banner of Truth Trust in 2019. *Union with Christ* contains sermons by Hugh Martin that have not previously been published and have been taken from manuscripts, together with a few sermons collected from rare magazines and pamphlets. This volume, along with the earlier one by the Banner of Truth, is edited by Drs Matthew and Catherine Hyde. It contains a biographical introduction by Rev D W B Somerset. The Committee have also reprinted *The Transfiguration* by Jonathan Ranken Anderson.

Bookroom

As we have stated on previous occasions, the Free Presbyterian Church is the only denomination in Scotland that continues to operate its own bookshop and it is one of the very few Christian bookshops still operating in the United Kingdom that is devoted entirely to distributing Reformed literature to various parts of the world. The level of congregational contributions and donations to the Bookroom have been maintained and the Committee are thankful for the continued support of the people of the Church. Following the launch for public use of a website in June 2021, the Committee had hoped that the deficits would be curtailed as it would enable the purchase of books directly online. Though this has helped, it has not made the significant impact of deficit reduction that we had hoped to achieve; accordingly the Committee are very concerned at the ongoing level of underlying deficit in the Bookroom's operations.

As in previous years we urge prayer to the Lord for His blessing on the production of Magazines month by month and on the publication and distribution of Christian literature.

WEBSITE COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev D W B Somerset

THE interest in the Free Presbyterian website has remained around the same level, with 110,000 "active users" and the total number of page-views over the last twelve months increasing from 340,000 to 353,000. Once again, the sermons are the most popular part of the website. Ministers (and those who manage recordings) are strongly encouraged to upload fresh sermons to the website, and the Committee can facilitate this if necessary. One ongoing project is the uploading of historic FP sermons from old reel-to-reel tapes.

The website editor, Rev Caleb Hembd, reports that most of the enquiries are from people seeking money, or from genealogical researchers, but occasionally there is a request for Bibles, which is passed to the Outreach Committee. A few emails ask questions on various subjects, such as the Sabbath, capital punishment, and the pagan origins of Christmas.

The Chinese and Spanish versions of the website continue to operate (the former under the supervision of Mr Bernard Yong) but neither has generated the interest that might have been hoped. The Committee is considering a much cheaper and simpler option for further foreign language versions such as Portuguese.

During the last year, a suitable scanner has been obtained, and the remaining issues of the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* are being scanned as PDFs and posted on the website. It is expected that this will be complete by the time of the Synod. We are grateful to Mr Roland van Kralingen for this work. It is hoped to scan the earlier issues of the *Young People's Magazine* (before 2011) as well, and possibly the *Gaelic Supplement* too.

Getting Google to index the PDFs on the website has proved surprisingly difficult, and the problem is still not resolved. Mr Yong is investigating an AI method for indexing all the material on the FP website which would circumvent this problem.

The maintaining of the website involves considerable work, which is shared among several people, to whom the Committee wishes to express thanks. The Church is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15), and we pray that the Lord would bless this aspect of the Church’s work in setting the truth before a needy and wicked world.

ARCHIVES COMMITTEE’S REPORT

Convener: Mr R Middleton

THE Archives Committee’s main work in the past year has been one of consolidation and indexing of the considerable amount of material that has been accumulated along with continuing the task of scanning Church records. A particularly valuable acquisition has been the obtaining of scanned copies of the nine handwritten diaries of Christina Macdonald, Portree, covering the period 1923-1971. These valuable diaries, along with other matters, contain details of the sermons that she heard during almost half a century. The Committee were given access to the original diaries along with a detailed sketch of Mrs Macdonald’s life written by her daughter and all the material has been scanned by the Committee. We are very grateful to her grand-daughter, Julia MacLeod Allan, for access to this material. There is an obituary of Mrs Macdonald in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol 78 (April 1973), pp 111-114.

Some of the consolidation work during the year has been cataloguing and indexing by date and by recipient the collection of letters belonging to Principal John MacLeod dating from the early days of the Free Presbyterian Church, and continuing the scanning of the entire archive of sermon transcripts preached largely at St Jude’s in the 1930s and taken down in shorthand and then typed up in full by Mrs Margaret Tallach. Though the entire collection has been photocopied, the process of scanning the copies is continuing.

In the Committee's report to the Synod in 2010, it was reported that we had arranged for the first Presbytery minute book (from 1893 to 1896) to be digitally transcribed and the Synod was informed of our proposal that this transcription be prepared for publishing with a full historical introduction and detailed notes on the individuals and events identified in the minutes. Since that date little progress has been made with regard to this project. However, the Committee intend, the Lord willing, to begin the necessary research and writing in the coming year. Something of the godly zeal of the founding fathers in organising the Church, in establishing congregations along with the training of students, is captured in the pages of this first minute book.

During the year the Committee have been investigating the most secure and cost-effective way of digitally storing the extensive documents that have been scanned. This has resulted in a distinct recommendation for which we have secured the necessary funding from the Finance Committee. It is envisaged, the Lord willing, that progress will be made in the implementation of this distinct project in the coming year. The importance of preserving and archiving material that may be in the hands of families in the Church cannot be sufficiently stressed. If elders who were members of Synod, or their families, have copies of the Synod business booklets/papers prior to the year 2000, we would be very grateful if we could have access in order to scan them. Although we do have the relevant material for some years prior to 2000, our collection is incomplete. In addition, if readers of this report have letters in any way relating to the Church's history or pamphlets written by our ministers, please contact the Convener of the Committee, Roy Middleton, whose contact details are on the inside of the rear cover of the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* or by email at roy.middleton0@gmail.com. If readers have photographs of ministers, elders and members of the church, group photographs taken at inductions or at communion gatherings or of church buildings now disused that they are willing to share with the Committee please contact Mr Murdo MacLean at Flat 1/1, 18 Hotspur Street, Glasgow, G20 8NN or by email at murdothemanse@yahoo.co.uk.

Finally, we again take this further opportunity to strongly advise all Clerks of Church courts to take steps towards digitising their records and securing the original documents in a fireproof safe. The Asia-Pacific and Zimbabwe Presbyteries are currently working on the scanning of their records.

REPORT OF DEPUTY TO CHESLEY

Rev I D MacDonald

WE are sure that many of our ministers in travelling as deputies to far flung places of the earth have found that the words of Psalm 139:9,10 were fulfilled in their experience: "Take I the morning wings, and dwell in utmost parts of

sea; ev'n there, Lord, shall Thy hand me lead, Thy right hand hold shall me". Considering the Lord's kindness both in travelling to Canada, and during my stay there, I cannot deny that this promise was fulfilled once again. After a very smooth journey from Scotland via London, I arrived at Toronto on the afternoon of Friday 28th March accompanied by my family. We were warmly greeted by two of the local elders, Mr Hector Ross and Mr Aashik Rao, who transported us to the Chesley Manse, roughly 2.5 hours north west of Toronto. After a long and exceptionally heavy winter, the ground, only very recently free of snow, was very brown and matted.

After a day of preparation on the Saturday, it was as usual a pleasure on the following day to open the Sabbath School which meets prior to the morning service. There were eleven children in attendance, including two of my own. Almost invariably, I have felt a blessing in addressing the children on these occasions over numerous years. The two elders who lead the Sabbath School classes, Mr David Kuiper and Mr Aashik Rao, take their duties very seriously indeed, as they seek to fill young minds with the doctrines of the truth. As true Calvinists they know very well that divine power is required to change the water of head knowledge to the wine of saving grace. This incomparable blessing we desire for our young friends in Chesley. The morning and evening services were well attended with all in the congregation present, which with one family away, amounted to around 40 people, not including my own family. There is a good age spread across the congregation, with one or two mothers in Israel left in old age, a number of middle-aged men and women, and quite a few younger families. One additional family has been attending the congregation in recent months, and so far they have shown commendable commitment, travelling each Sabbath from Barrie, a city in central Ontario, 50 or so miles north of Toronto, and around two hours' drive from Chesley. The elders of the congregation now hold a private prayer meeting on Saturday evening, and since they have begun this practice, my own experience has been of a greater degree of felt liberty in preaching on the Sabbath day.

During the week thus begun, I started my visitation of the congregation, and, by the time the Communion Season began the following week, was able to visit almost all who regularly attend the services. It is a pleasure to visit the hospitable homes of our friends in Chesley and we were shown much kindness, for which we note our gratitude. In many houses, including those of the adherents, there appeared to be a keen ear for conversation on the things of Christ, and we trust there were times of spiritual fellowship in the homes of some of the Lord's people. It would be a great pity if the Chesley people would lose their relish for Christ-centred conversation in their homes by being overly taken up with political intrigues, or the externals of religion. Accompanied by one of the elders, Mr Hector Ross, I was also able to visit the new family in their home in Barrie. It was interesting to learn that the Church's standards of separation from the world were one factor in making it apparent to our new friends that they had found a congregation in which Christ is honoured in all His offices. The great need for all thus coming into the bounds of our Church

is that they come to make sure work of resting upon Christ and His finished work as the only foundation for their eternal salvation, and to see their need of the new birth and a true saving faith in order to come to that rest.

It was notable and commendable that all the Chesley people are regular in their attendance on the weekly Prayer Meetings, and that the phenomena of the “half-day hearer”, so sadly common among the lukewarm in some quarters in Scotland, has not yet been seen or heard of among our friends in Ontario. In general, the professing people there show a depth of spiritual experience, zeal for the truth, fear of God, wariness of light and superficial religion, vigilance against declension from the standards of godliness, and a strong attachment to the full-orbed and distinctive witness of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. This may be partly accounted for by the fact that they have now been in the bounds of the Church for over 50 years, and have been blessed with faithful, true-hearted, Interim Moderators from the home church who have nurtured them in the godliness of life, reverence in worship, spirituality of mind, and love for the truth characteristic of the best of the Free Presbyterian Church. In addition, it is obvious from hearing the Chesley people speak of their late elder Mr Gerrit Schuit, a founding member of the congregation when accepted into the Church in 1974, that they had in him an example of true godliness, true Calvinism, and true love to our Church’s witness. His faithfulness to the truth and in dealing with men’s souls has likely left a stamp upon the congregation which it will be their wisdom to seek to uphold. At present, the congregation has the privilege of three faithful elders who are God-fearing men, and who attend to their duties diligently, carefully, and prayerfully in the long-continued absence of a settled ministry among them. May the Lord of the Harvest send forth a labourer into His harvest there by granting them a pastor after His own heart who would feed them with knowledge and understanding.

The Communion Season began during my second week and was well attended, and it was encouraging to see how many of the working members and adherents of the congregation had clearly taken time off to attend the services. We hope that this is a sign of their valuing of gospel ordinances, and it would be good if a similar prioritising of the solemn assemblies of Zion would be found in all our congregations, at home and abroad. There were a few visitors from other parts of North America, including the group in Calgary, Alberta, who have expressed an interest in joining the Church, as well as a young man from Vancouver, British Columbia, who is connected with the new family who have been attending in Chesley. Good it is when those who come among us show a teachable spirit, seriousness with regard to making sure of Christ for their souls, and a humility which makes them “covet to be silent”. It was with pleasure and satisfaction that a young woman who attends the meetings held in Calgary, and previously attended our services in London, was accepted as a communicant member by the Kirk Session. The spiritual prosperity of our Zion matters above all external advantages of numbers and outward commitment, and one evidence that there is life in the vine is when

the tender grapes of grace appear in our people and give a good smell of the broken and contrite heart, and of dependence on, and love to, a crucified Saviour. Would that many such were raised up in Chesley and across all our congregations. The services were, we trust, not without tokens of the Lord's presence among us, and the congregation appeared deeply attentive for the most part. Our labours in Chesley ended with the weekly prayer meeting on the evening of the Monday of the Communion, when we were led to speak on the connection between the eternal, unchanging duration of Christ the Church's Head, and the permanent duration of His Church on earth, as found in these words at the close of Psalm 102 (vv 27,28, metrical version): "But Thou the same art, and Thy years are to eternity. The children of Thy servants shall continually endure; and in Thy sight, O Lord, their seed shall be established sure." May these words of promised continuance, and the establishing upon which it depends, be fulfilled in the experience of our Chesley congregation.